

STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF PASSENGER AND NIGHT DRIVING RESTRICTIONS ON NOVICE DRIVERS

PREPARATION, REVIEW AND AUTHORISATION

FINAL REPORT

Study on the Effect of Passenger & Night
Driving Restrictions on Novice Drivers

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

E.S.1 Background

Young novice drivers remain one of the most vulnerable road user groups in the community. They are at risk of crash and road trauma at levels well above the proportion they represent among licensed drivers. A typical figure is that drivers 17-25 years old represent about one sixth of licensed drivers but up to one third of drivers killed⁽¹⁾. In 2001 there were 14.4 deaths per 100,000 population amongst male drivers 17-25 years, more than twice as many as for any age group except male drivers over 70 years (9.9 deaths per 100,000)⁽²⁾.

The main way of reducing the risks for young drivers that has been adopted both in Australia and overseas is graduated licensing. The second and complementary measure is to put restrictions on young drivers designed to reduce the risks in a period when crash risks are greatest. Typically, restrictions are limited to a lower permissible blood alcohol concentration (zero or 0.02 depending on jurisdiction) and, in NSW, a speed restriction. Victoria, alone among Australian jurisdictions, imposes a passenger restriction, but only when offences have been committed by a P-plate driver that result in licence suspension and have been rarely imposed.

Since an initial study in 1994 no serious Australian study has been identified which has examined passenger and night driving restrictions. When considering night driving and passenger restrictions, researchers and policy makers have typically pointed to North America where night driving and/or passenger restrictions are frequently applied as part of graduated licensing provisions, and noted that the licensing age is usually lower (often 15 or 16), and that therefore a different parent/teen relationship and dynamic applies. In Australia, it is argued, licensing ages of 17 (for most jurisdictions) or 18 (for Victoria) and the drinking age of 18 mean that the extent of parental control implied by passenger restrictions and curfews is not feasible. Whether or not this proposition is true, it has never been tested in Australia. No published research has been identified where those most concerned – teenagers and their parents – have been asked what they think of such restrictions or the ways in which they might be implemented if favoured.

E.S.2 Study Objective

This research aimed to establish whether passenger and night driving restrictions are feasible for novice drivers through studying a sample of college students and their parents in the Australian Capital Territory, together with other stakeholders including the driving instruction industry, government safety and enforcement officials.

The flow chart in Figure 1-1 provides an overview of the primary processes undertaken in this study. Comprehensive and sensitive community consultation was a pivotal element, encompassing parent and student surveys and key stakeholder meetings in the form of focus groups. Information gathered in the surveys was used to provide data and input to the focus groups.

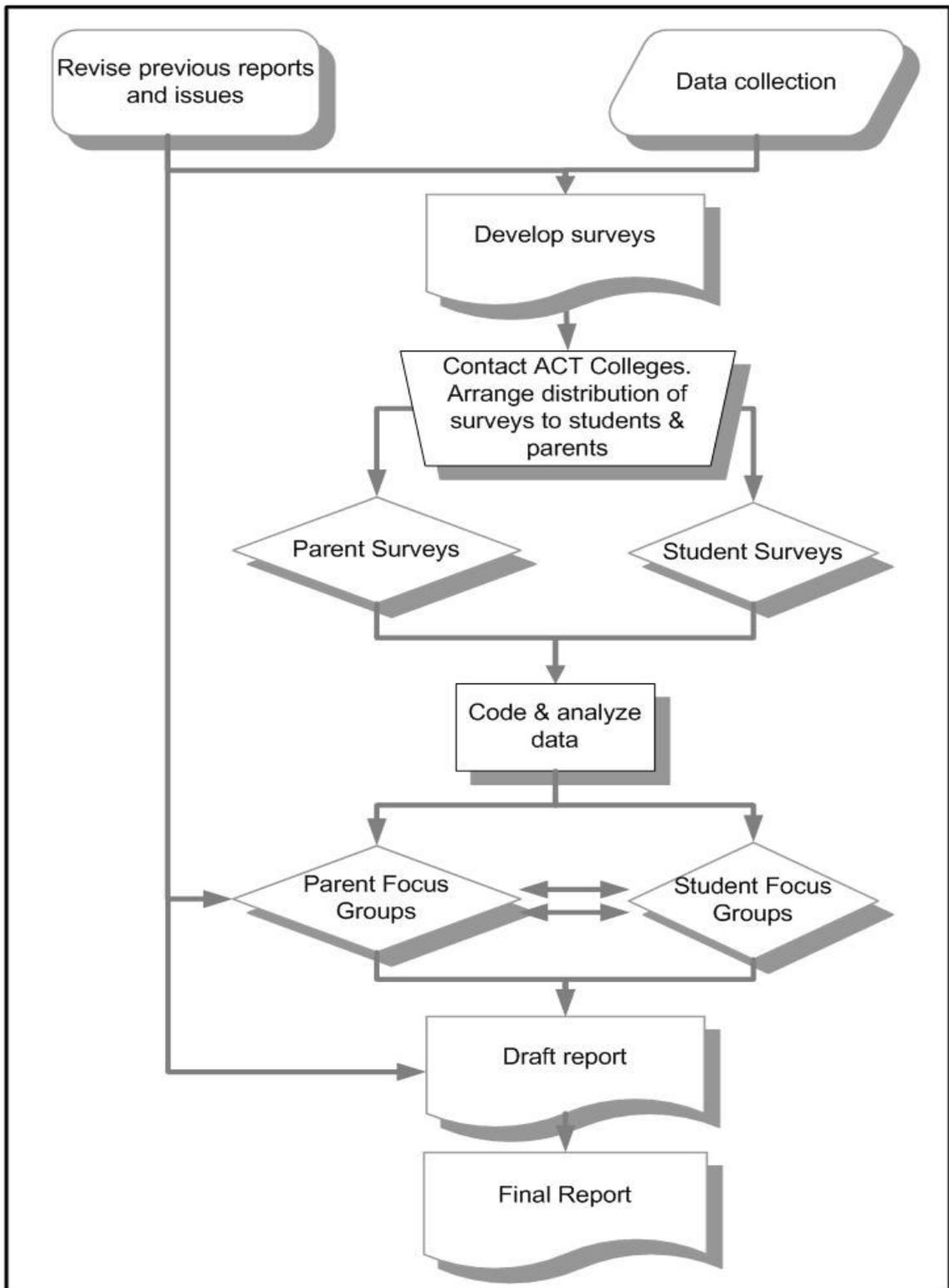


Figure E.S.-1: Primary Study Processes

Although young drivers needed to be involved, it was also necessary to obtain a balanced community viewpoint, including from those who would be indirectly affected by the proposed restrictions such as parents and carers, police, motoring organisations and other stakeholders. The consultation processes enabled parents, stakeholders and students to express their point of view, feelings and reactions to the restrictions, identify issues, develop alternative options and restrictions, and nominate any preferred options. An initial literature survey provided background information and a basis for survey questions and focus group discussion issues.

E.S.3 Literature Review

A major review of literature on the implementation of graduated licensing, principally examining the experience of North America and New Zealand has identified a number of measures that have been shown, or have promise, in improving the safety of young drivers (Senserrick & Whelan, 2003⁽⁷⁾). In those countries, however, licensing ages are typically lower at 15 or 16 years than is the case in most Australian states and territories. This has implications for the extent to which the findings can be applied in the Australian context.

Issues in young driver safety are discussed, including matters in which young drivers are especially vulnerable. These include age and inexperience, and specific driving skill or capability issues that are central to reducing crash risks for young drivers. These are:

- Steering control
- Speed control
- Parallel processing/multitasking – skill integration
- Visual search/scanning
- Hazard detection
- Risk assessment
- Decision making
- Risky lifestyle and risk taking.

Nearly all of these point to both youth and inexperience as the basic concern. Night driving and passenger restrictions can moderate some of these risks. However the safety benefits need to be balanced against the highly mobile and car-dependent nature of Australian society, and the fact that most Australian new licensees are older than their counterparts in North America and New Zealand. This has implications for the extent to which young people can be expected to comply with restrictions that affect their mobility and independence.

The review discusses these implications and the extent to which findings of the overseas research can be applied in Australia, and some of the strategies that might be adopted to make them effective safety measures. Other issues examined in the review include social and community support, equity and compliance, and the possibility of balancing these sometimes competing concerns to determine whether restrictions could be made to work in the Australian social and licensing context.

E.S.4 Community Consultation

E.S.4.1 Student and Parent Surveys

As Canberra colleges have a “captive audience” of 17 and 18-year old novice drivers, they were asked for their help in distributing surveys to students during their pastoral or tutor groups and to the parents via these students. Prior to the surveys being administered, permission to approach the colleges was sought from the Catholic Education Office and the ACT Department of Education.

An article was prepared for each school’s newsletter telling parents about the study and letting them know that a survey would be coming home to them with their child. Each student was then given a survey to take home for their parents to fill in and return in a reply paid envelope. A “consent to be contacted” form accompanied the survey detailing information about the proposed focus groups for those parents interested in discussing the issues further. Outcomes from the surveys were used to direct discussions in the focus groups. Copies of the surveys and forms are given in Appendices A and B.

A good survey response rate depended in part on co-operation from each college and initial contact with them was an important part of the pre-survey preparation. If the colleges were enthusiastic about involving their students in something that could have an important impact on their life, then they tended to encourage their students to participate in the survey and the follow-up focus groups.

Outcomes and Results from the Student Surveys

A total of 4,500 surveys were distributed to students, which represents over half of the target population of college students in Canberra. A 20% response rate, or 900 survey responses, would provide a statistically significant sample of the target population. On completion of the survey, a sample size of 1,407 responses was obtained, which represents 32% of surveys issued to students and 17% of the target population.

While it is unfortunate that more students did not choose to participate in the survey, the sample size is statistically representative of the target population as a whole. The trends obtained in subsequent analyses remained consistent even when the sample was randomly halved and then analysed to determine any overt changes in the results from the whole sample.

The main outcomes from the student survey were:

- Approximately 89% of students that filled in the questionnaire held either provisional or learner driver licences.
- 2 students had suspended licences.
- Only a small percentage of provisional drivers (9%) had done P-off but about half indicated their intentions to do so in the near future.
- 71% of provisional and 30% of learner drivers had their own car and the majority of the rest indicated that they had access to one on a regular basis.
- Almost 25% of drivers indicated that they drove “most nights/ all the time” with 2 or more friends in the car.
- Over half of all drivers (55% in total and 80% of provisional drivers) indicated that they worked of an evening and relied on their car to get them to and from work.

The indicated rates of compliance with passenger and night driving restrictions decreased as the driver became more independent. That is, students without a licence indicated they were far more likely to comply with restrictions (38%) than those who had either a learner licence (24%) or a provisional licence (8% curfew – 16% passenger restrictions). Students indicated that they would be more willing to comply with passenger restrictions than night driving restrictions as the majority of respondents said that they regularly drove after 10pm.

Of concern was the information that 5% of P-platers who had not done P-off did not display their P-plates when they drove and 13% of learner drivers indicated that they did not display their L-plates when they drove. Two provisional drivers had suspended licences. 1 driver had already done P-off and both had their own cars. Both students indicated that they would obey passenger restrictions but not a night driving restriction if they were introduced. One of the drivers indicated that they had “lost their licence because of a friend”.

Respondents were asked to provide comments on restrictions and an enormous variety of comments were received. The main objection to night driving restrictions was that many students had work/sporting/social commitments that finished after the suggested curfew time. Most indicated that they would not obey the night driving or passenger restrictions as it was not practical, was discriminatory and punished good drivers and would be too hard to police. Many indicated that buses did not run frequently enough at late hours and interchanges were unsafe and that taxis were too expensive.

Many students acted as designated drivers for their friends/ family and restrictions could put many people into unsafe situations. It was frequently pointed out that provisional drivers were not the only unsafe drivers on the road and that it was unfair to punish them and not other drivers. If night driving and passenger restrictions were adopted, then it would be very difficult for novice drivers to gain valuable driving experience and would only delay this aspect of their education.

Outcomes and Results from the Parent Surveys

Access to parents relied on students remembering to take the surveys home with them and then remembering to give them to their parents. A letter accompanying the parent survey outlined the reason for the study and what the researchers wished to achieve – that is, they were told that the study was seeking feedback on the acceptance of passenger and night-time restrictions for their young drivers and their anticipated compliance, and that focus groups would be formed to discuss the issues further. Also it indicated that if these restrictions were introduced then that would have implications for additional involvement of parents in picking up and dropping off their children during the curfew hours. Their reactions and feelings to this were being sought.

Unfortunately, only 225 parents completed and returned the Parent Survey. While this does not statistically represent the population of parents of novice drivers, the results did give a clear and consistent response to the questions asked. The lack of returned surveys might well be due to many students not giving parents the survey. However, the researchers were restricted to the method adopted for distributing surveys to parents as they could not access parent databases at the colleges because of privacy issues. The method adopted was determined to be the most cost-effective way of reaching parents.

Responses from the parent survey were separated into 3 categories – parents whose children only had learner licences (24%), parents whose children only had provisional licences (45%) and parents with children that had provisional and learner drivers (30%). The main points from the analyses of parent surveys were:

- 70% of their children had their own car and the majority of the rest (88%) had access to one on a regular basis.
- While almost 25% of parents indicated that they imposed restrictions on their children when driving, these restrictions were mainly passenger and distance restrictions.
- Only 18% indicated that they currently imposed a night driving restriction.

Parental support for passenger and night driving restrictions decreased as their child/ren became more independent, and they were more supportive of passenger restrictions (42% overall) than a night driving restriction (24% overall). Parents of students with a learners licence were more supportive of passenger restrictions (approximately 61%) than those whose children had either a provisional licence (40%) or both learner and provisional drivers licence (34%). Support for a night driving restriction decreased from 34% (learners) to 24% (provisional) to 15% (parents of both). Only 20% of parents thought these restrictions could be successfully implemented.

Parents' comments generally reiterated those of their children. The main objection to night driving restrictions was that many students had work/sporting/social commitments that finished after the suggested curfew time. Most stated that they felt these restrictions were impractical, discriminatory and punished good drivers and would be too hard to police. Many parents indicated that bus times were inconvenient, particularly late at night and that interchanges were unsafe and taxis too expensive. A significant number of parents indicated that they were very happy now their children had their provisional licences as that gave them independence and they no longer had to get up in the middle of the night to pick them up.

Parents frequently stated that they knew their children and trusted them completely to drive in a safe and responsible manner and to not be influenced by their peers. They said that they have told them not to take other children in their car if they thought they would be a "bad" influence and expected their children to obey them.

In addition, many of their children acted as designated drivers for their friends and family and restrictions could put many people into unsafe situations. They also relied on their provisional drivers to pick up or drop off younger siblings.

E.S.4.2 Student and Parent Focus Groups

Focus groups involve organised discussions with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences about a specific topic and are well suited to gaining several different perspectives of the same topic. The benefits of focus group research include gaining insights into people's shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation. This is particularly useful when considering the anticipated impact of these proposals on young drivers and when there are power differences between the participants and decision-makers or professionals as is the case with this study.

Students and parents who filled in the "consent to be contacted" form were contacted by telephone and their willingness to still attend a focus group ascertained. At the same time, the person's address was obtained so that an information pack could be sent to them detailing focus group times and locations as well as background information.

Parent and stakeholder focus groups were held on different evenings to the student focus groups. Combined student and parent focus groups were not deemed to be viable as it was felt that the presence of a parent might inhibit candid responses from teenage stakeholders. At the parent focus groups, invited stakeholders included: Road Safety Management, ACT Department of Urban Services; the Australian Federal Police; school and college representatives (eg those responsible for managing and running the Road Ready courses) and relevant people from the ACT Department of Education and Training; driving instructors and Road Ready Plus, the post-licence training program available in the ACT. Representatives were also invited from government agencies in Queanbeyan as well as car insurance agencies such as the NRMA.

Outcomes from the Student Focus Groups

26 students indicated that they would like to come to the north side focus group and 95 indicated that they would like to attend the south-side focus group. On the evenings of the focus groups, 3 students attended the one held at Lake Ginninderra College and 6 students attended the one at Erindale College. Despite the disappointing turn out of students, an interesting and informative discussion was held with each group.

The initial general discussion with participants centred on the reasoning behind why restrictions were being considered. Did they think having passenger and late night driving restrictions mattered? The students indicated that they understood why State and Territory Governments might want to impose such restrictions but felt that it was not fair that the majority who did the right thing should be affected by the minority who didn't. The students also indicated that their parents already often imposed some sort of restriction on them with regards to time and not drinking alcohol and whom they could take and they felt that was sufficient.

Some young women felt that it would be unfair to impose restrictions only on male drivers (as suggested in the parent focus groups) as they felt young women were often much worse drivers than the men. They frequently had ongoing conversations with back seat passengers, turning to look at them over their shoulder as well as sending text messages from their mobile phones whilst driving. These young ladies also stated that their driving behaviour when with their parents was significantly different (i.e. very sedate) compared to when they were driving with their peers.

Students felt that limiting passengers would mean that more cars would be on the road more often with more young people who had been drinking. Having a designated driver meant that fewer cars were on the road and that those drinking didn't have to worry about driving.

A discussion on night driving restrictions centred on whether it was feasible and how to make this enforceable for first year P-plater drivers. Concerns were raised about exemptions for people who work. Participants pointed out that there would be many ways in which a person could get around the restriction. For example - a person could start a sport and get an exemption to travel during curfew and then drop the sport or they could get an exemption for work and use it when they were not going to work. How would a policeman know if the novice driver was on their way home from work or on their way home from a party?

Some pointed out that their parents would not pick them up from parties in the early hours of the morning and they would be extremely reluctant to take public transport. It was pointed out that young women usually travelled together to parties because they felt safer in a group and that someone would be less likely to harass them on the road if there two or three in the car. Also they tended to look out for each other to make sure they got home safely.

Participants were asked whether there were any other alternative initiatives that could be considered. Some of their ideas included:

- Having a specified drag route for drivers to use, as this would reduce the likelihood of them using other roads to do burn outs and spins.
- More driver training and education. They felt it was too easy to get your licence using the logbook method.
- If restrictions were introduced then only have them for the first 3 months so that they could get experience driving but know that the restrictions would not be long term.
- They suggested that double demerit points for all drivers be introduced between the hours of 12 and 4am. Most young drivers were very concerned with their “hip pocket” and double demerit points and fines would be an effective way of getting their compliance.
- If restrictions were introduced, then the money saved by insurance companies and the community from the reduced cost of accidents should be put into heavily subsidised taxis, as bus interchanges were not safe at night and this would make young people less likely to use their cars illegally in the evenings.

Outcomes from the Parent Surveys

Parent focus groups were held on 19th October at Lake Ginninderra College in the north and 26th October at Erindale College in the south. 30 parents and stakeholders indicated that they would like to come to the north side focus group and 40 indicated that they would like to attend the south-side focus group.

On the evenings of the focus groups, 15 parents and stakeholders attended the one held at Lake Ginninderra College and 26 parents and stakeholders attended the one at Erindale College. Each discussion group in a focus group meeting ideally has between 6 and 8 people. Because there was good attendance at each venue, an interesting, informative and sometimes heated discussion was held within each group. The discussion format for the parents and stakeholders focus groups followed that of the student ones. A summary of the findings for the parents and stakeholder’s focus groups follows but does not include issues previously raised by students and parents in surveys and student focus groups.

Parents indicated that they understood why governments might want to impose restrictions but felt that it was not fair that the majority who did the right thing should be affected by the minority who don’t. Some parents felt very strongly that their daughters were very good drivers and shouldn’t be punished because of young male drivers bad behaviour. The parents also indicated that they already often imposed some sort of restriction on their novice drivers particularly if the child was using the parent’s car, such as not being allowed to drive to the coast with their friends. One parent said that they did not allow their child to drive their car unless they had the required car insurance excess in their bank account to pay for the excess should they have an accident.

Parents and stakeholders stated that experience was a great teacher and that we as parents often learnt how to deal with dangerous driving situations by being put into that situation and having to learn to deal with it. If we continue to restrict our children and limit their driving experiences with night driving and passenger restrictions, then this would be counterproductive as they do not have the opportunity to learn how to deal with different and often difficult driving situations.

Drugs and alcohol issues were changing in our society and any restrictions had to reflect those changes. Education about the effects of alcohol on a person's ability to drive was very extensive but many young drivers now preferred to take drugs and drive rather than to drink and drive. They felt that this also needed to be explored and appropriate changes made. The effects of fatigue and the dangers of distraction particularly with the use of mobile phones in cars should also be major education topics for all drivers. Restrictions should be about harm minimisation with appropriate guidelines rather than just knee jerk reactions to certain events.

Parents realised that most social activity takes place in the evening and generally there was a higher occupancy in cars of an evening than during the day. Tiredness could be a significant factor influencing safe driving behaviour. Many parents felt that this generation was generally far more responsible about driving and were better educated than most of the adults in the focus groups had been at the same age.

Many parents and stakeholders felt that something could be worked out but that it would have to be "sold" very well to the target audiences – that is parents and novice drivers. Parents and stakeholders were asked whether there were any other initiatives they thought could be introduced or seriously considered. Some of their ideas included:

- That there was a great need for more driver training and education, not only for the novice driver but also for the parent who is teaching the novice driver. They did not feel that defensive driving courses were necessarily the best way to go as often what was learnt in that type of course was quickly forgotten and then could make the young driver overconfident of their abilities when they found themselves in a dangerous situation. There should be an area set aside where young people could learn and practice defensive driving as often as required.
- Only introduce restrictions for the first 3 months so that novice drivers could get experience but know that the restrictions would not apply long term. This would be easier to comply with. If at the end of three months the driver had experienced no problems, then the restrictions could be waived and/or they could get extra points on their licence.
- Double demerit points for all drivers could be introduced between the hours of 12 and 4am. Most young drivers were very concerned with their "hip pocket" and double demerit points and fines would be an effective way of getting their compliance. Alternatively you could have incremental demerit points for all drivers at this time ranging from smaller to bigger depending on the seriousness of the offence.

- Heavier fines could be introduced for provisional drivers for driving offences and breaking passenger restrictions.
- The size to power ratio of a car could be strictly limited for novice drivers.
- The money saved by reductions in deaths and serious accidents could be used to provide free buses that were not restricted to particular routes and subsidised taxis.
- Restrictions could be imposed on young drivers who have already been booked for a driving offence or had an accident. Alternatively if restrictions were introduced, and a novice driver was caught breaking them, then they could face an immediate loss of licence.

E.S.5 Conclusions and Recommendations

The outcomes from this research suggested that there was a very common view with parents that ‘our kids don’t behave like that’ and that the risks applied to others, and given that, why should ‘good’ kids be penalised? Why should all be punished because of the irresponsible behaviour of a few? It was therefore apparent that parents did not understand the potentially disastrous impact of the lack of experience, including the peculiar difficulty of night driving, the effect of fatigue, peer influences, or distraction or the potential for being the victim of someone else’s drunk driving or mistake. Restrictions were seen as a punishment rather than a protection against risks that cannot otherwise be avoided.

The general feeling was that passenger restrictions were a good idea but would be almost impossible to implement and police. Exemptions, such as jobs, early morning sporting and athletic practice, chauffeuring of younger siblings for similar purposes, were seen as an integral part of the requirement. However, given that 90% of provisional drivers in the Student Survey indicated that they had an evening job, it seems likely that a significant amount of exemptions would have to be granted and could easily be abused by the novice driver. It could also have the potential to be an administrative nightmare.

Parents at the focus groups often expressed their willingness to drive their teenagers to or from venues at any hour of the night, or to provide taxi money, to prevent them from being exposed to risky situations. However, the parents who attended the focus groups might not have been truly representative of parents of novice drivers as a whole. Many parents who answered the Parent Survey indicated that one of the reasons they gave their child either their own car or unlimited access to a family car was so that they didn’t have to chauffeur them any more. Indeed, the new driver was seen to be a means of devolving many driving responsibilities from the parent onto the child.

Participants in the focus groups felt that there were many other ways of reducing novice driver exposure to risks without enforcing passenger restrictions and night-time curfews. Some alternatives suggested were double demerit points and fines for the hours 12 to 4 am; limiting the power, capacity and output of the car they can drive; more extensive driver education and practice; and using money saved by insurance agencies on reduced payouts and premiums to fund free night-time buses and significant taxi subsidies.

Ultimately it was felt that better education was preferable and that if passenger and night driving restrictions became a reality, then they would have to be very well “sold” to novice drivers and their parents.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Young novice drivers remain one of the most vulnerable road user groups in the community. They are at risk of crash and road trauma at levels well above the proportion they represent among licensed drivers. A typical figure is that drivers 17-25 years old represent about one sixth of licensed drivers but up to one third of drivers killed⁽¹⁾. In 2001 there were 14.4 deaths per 100,000 population amongst male drivers 17-25 years, more than twice as many as for any age group except male drivers over 70 years (9.9 deaths per 100,000⁽²⁾).

This is despite the considerable efforts to improve the safety of young novice drivers that have been made in the last 20 years at least, with the implementation progressively of provisional licensing schemes, extended learner permit periods, restrictions on driving during the provisional or probationary licence periods, and similar measures.

With the possible exception of vehicle safety, young novice driver issues have probably attracted more research and policy attention than almost any other road safety issue. In Australia, the Monash University Accident Research Centre undertook for the Federal Office of Road Safety in the early 1990s one of the largest streams of research on a single topic to that date⁽³⁾. Several conferences, symposia and parliamentary inquiries dealing with aspects of young novice driver safety have been held, and a significant number of papers on the topic always appear in annual Research, Policing and Education Conferences.

The main way of reducing the risks for young drivers that has been adopted both in Australia and overseas is graduated licensing. Graduated licensing provisions for new drivers, some components of which appear in all Australian and NZ new driver licensing provisions, have as their objective to achieve two effects (Foss & Goodwin⁽⁴⁾).

The first is to produce drivers who at the time they go solo for the first time, that is when they are awarded their provisional or probationary licence, are better prepared and have a better introduction to the complexities of driving. This is achieved generally in Australian jurisdictions by requiring longer and minimum periods for which a learner's permit (driving only with a supervising driver in possession of a full licence) must be held and, more recently, to require learners to undertake a certain number of hours' driving practice in a range of conditions, and to certify that practice in a log book.

The second and complementary measure is to put restrictions on young drivers designed to reduce the risks in a period when crash risks are greatest. The advent of the two-stage Provisional licence in NSW extends this principle. Typically, restrictions are limited to a lower permissible blood alcohol concentration (zero or 0.02 depending on jurisdiction) and, in NSW, a speed restriction.

Victoria, alone among Australian jurisdictions, imposes a passenger restriction, but only when offences have been committed by a P-plate driver that result in licence suspension. In that event, the probationer is restricted to one passenger for twelve months once the licence has been reinstated (see VicRoads web site). It is understood (personal communication) that the passenger restriction penalty has been used only rarely if at all.

New Zealand, which has a more comprehensive graduated licensing scheme than any Australian jurisdiction, imposes night time driving curfews and passenger restrictions. Begg and Stephenson⁽⁵⁾ reported in 2003 that since the introduction of the graduated driver licensing scheme in 1987 there has been a continuing reduction in the number of crash-related injuries to young people, and (more importantly) a decrease in the rate per number of licensed drivers. A later review (Begg, 2001 in⁽⁵⁾) determined that the night time driving curfew had made a positive contribution to the reduction in young driver crashes, but that while the results on passenger restrictions were 'encouraging' it was not possible to fully evaluate the impact of that measure.

In Australia, one of the components of the Monash University young driver study was the report by Drummond⁽⁶⁾ which examined the potential for exposure reduction measures to reduce the risks for young drivers. The report concluded that passenger restrictions were unlikely to be effective. It was further concluded that night curfews should be preferred on first principles⁽⁶⁾.

The analysis conducted at the time from which that conclusion was drawn showed that, for Victorian data for 1990 and 1991, young drivers have a higher proportion of their crashes while carrying passengers and, as crash severity increases the probability that young drivers will be carrying multiple passengers also increases. It also showed that young drivers have more crashes between 10pm and 5am for all occupancy classifications.

Nevertheless Drummond concluded that imposing passenger restrictions would not make young drivers barred from carrying passengers any safer. One possible effect of imposing passenger restrictions was exposure transfer: young people barred from travelling as passengers might instead drive their own cars and lead to an aggregate increase in crash risk. There might also be some exposure transfer to other groups, such as to parents who would then have to drive their children. Concern was also expressed about the equity and viability of imposing passenger restrictions. To these concerns might be added the effect on 'designated driver' practices which allow a driver to carry a number of passengers, and the need for exemptions for employment.

Since that time (1994) no serious Australian study has been identified which has examined these propositions. When considering night driving and passenger restrictions researchers and policy makers have typically pointed to North America where night driving and/or passenger restrictions are frequently applied as part of graduated licensing provisions, and noted that the licensing age is usually lower (often 15 or 16), and that therefore a different parent/teen relationship and dynamic applies.

In Australia, it is argued, licensing ages of 17 (for most jurisdictions) or 18 (for Victoria) and the drinking age of 18 mean that the extent of parental control implied by passenger and night driving restrictions is not feasible. These issues are examined in the literature review in Chapter 3.

Whether or not this proposition is true, it has never been tested in Australia. No published research has been identified where those most concerned – teenagers and their parents – have been asked what they think of such restrictions or the ways in which they might be implemented if favoured.

1.2. Objectives

This research aims to establish whether passenger restrictions and curfews are feasible for novice drivers through studying a sample of college students and their parents in the Australian Capital Territory, together with other stakeholders including the driving instruction industry, government safety and enforcement officials.

1.3. Overview of Study Processes

The flow chart in Figure 1-1 provides an overview of the primary processes undertaken in this study. Comprehensive and sensitive community consultation was a pivotal element, encompassing parent and student surveys and key stakeholder meetings in the form of focus groups. Information gathered in the surveys was used to provide data and input to the focus groups.

Although young drivers needed to be involved, it was also necessary to obtain a balanced community viewpoint including those who would be indirectly affected by the proposed restrictions such as parents and carers, police, motoring bodies and other stakeholders. The consultation processes enabled parents, stakeholders and students to express their point of view, feelings and reactions to the restrictions, identify issues, develop alternative options and restrictions and nominate preferred options.

1.4. Report Status

This is a draft report and is subject to review prior to finalisation. The outputs from this report are limited to the data available at the time of the study and the willingness of students and parents to participate in the surveys and focus groups.

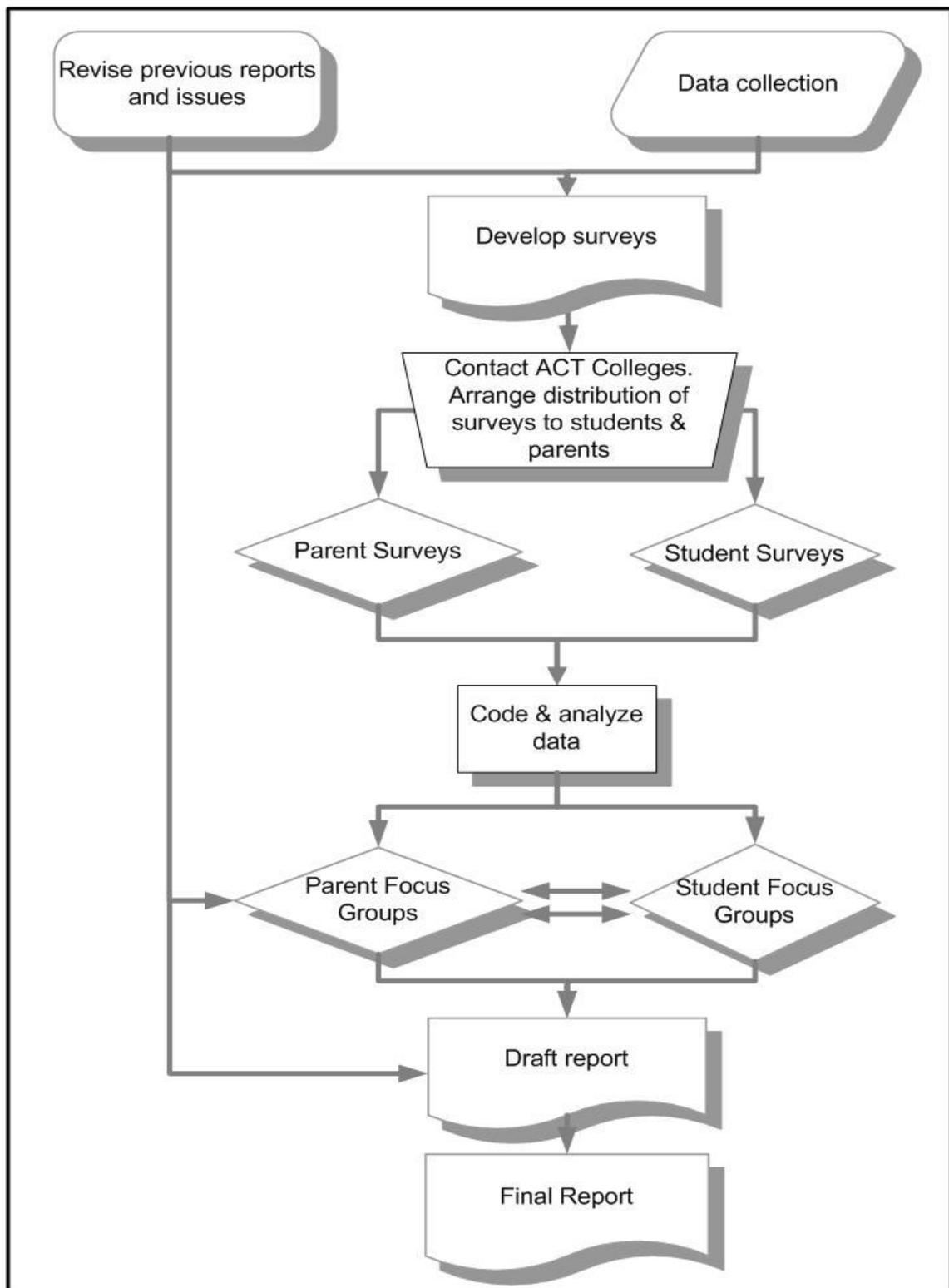


Figure 1-1: Primary Study Processes

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Introduction

This study examines how effective night driving and passenger restrictions would be for novice drivers by asking teenagers, their parents and other community representatives what their reactions and responses would be to these exposure reduction measures. This was undertaken through self-administered surveys and focus groups. An initial literature survey provided background information and a basis for survey questions and focus group discussion issues.

2.2. Pre-focus Group Surveys

It was decided that the best way to contact the largest number of novice drivers would be to approach colleges throughout Canberra for their help as they had a virtual “captive audience” of 17 and 18 year-olds. The colleges were asked for their help in distributing the surveys to the students during their pastoral or tutor groups and to the parents via these students. Prior to the surveys being administered, permission to approach the colleges was sought from the Catholic Education Office and the ACT Department of Education.

An article was prepared for each school’s newsletter to inform parents about the study and to let them know that a survey would be coming home to them with their son or daughter. Student surveys were then distributed via the colleges and each student was given a survey to take home for their parents to fill in and return in a reply paid envelope. Attached to the survey was a “consent to be contacted” form which detailed information about the proposed focus groups and asked them to provide their name and phone number if they were interested in participating in a focus group to discuss the issues in more detail. Outcomes from this survey were then used to direct discussions in the focus groups. Copies of the surveys are given in Appendices A and B.

A good response rate depended in part on co-operation from each college. If they were enthusiastic about involving their students in something that could have an important impact on their life, then they would be likely to encourage their students to participate in the survey and the follow-up focus groups. Contact with the college authorities was therefore an important part of pre-survey preparation.

2.2.1. Survey Questions

The surveys were designed to be as short and succinct as possible. The surveys were no more than 10 short questions, such as: age, sex, licence type and a few situational questions. Students were asked to answer as honestly as possible and it was stressed that responses were totally anonymous.

An accompanying form gave details about the focus groups that were to be conducted at a later date to explore the outcome of surveys. The respondents were asked to give their names and phone numbers if they were willing to be involved in a focus group.

2.2.2. Coding and Collation of Data

Coding and collation of the survey data into an Access database was undertaken in-house at SMEC. A summary of comments and concerns raised in the surveys were also extracted and are given in Chapters 4 and 5. They were also used to direct discussion in the focus groups.

2.3. Methodology for Focus Groups

2.3.1. Representation

Those students and parents that filled in the “Consent to be Contacted” form, were contacted by telephone and their willingness to still attend the focus groups was ascertained. At the same time, the person’s address was obtained so that an information pack could be sent to them. They were also asked their preference for attending either a north-side focus group to be held at Lake Ginninderra College on the evenings of 19th and 20th of October 2004 or a south-side focus group to be held at Erindale College on the evenings of 26th and 27th of October 2004. Parent and stakeholder focus groups would be held on the 19th and 26th and student focus groups were to be held on the following evenings. The information pack sent to participants provided details about the location of the focus group and outcomes from the surveys as well as additional background information about the study.

Combined student and parent focus groups were not deemed to be viable as it was felt that the presence of a parent might inhibit candid responses from teenage stakeholders. At the parent focus groups, stakeholders such as representatives of Road Safety Management in the ACT Department of Urban Services, the Australian Federal Police, school and college representatives (eg those responsible for managing and running the Road Ready courses) and relevant people in the ACT Department of Education and Training, driving instructors and a representative from Road Ready Plus, the post-licence training program available in the ACT were invited to attend. Representatives were also invited from government agencies in Queanbeyan as well as car insurance agencies such as the NRMA.

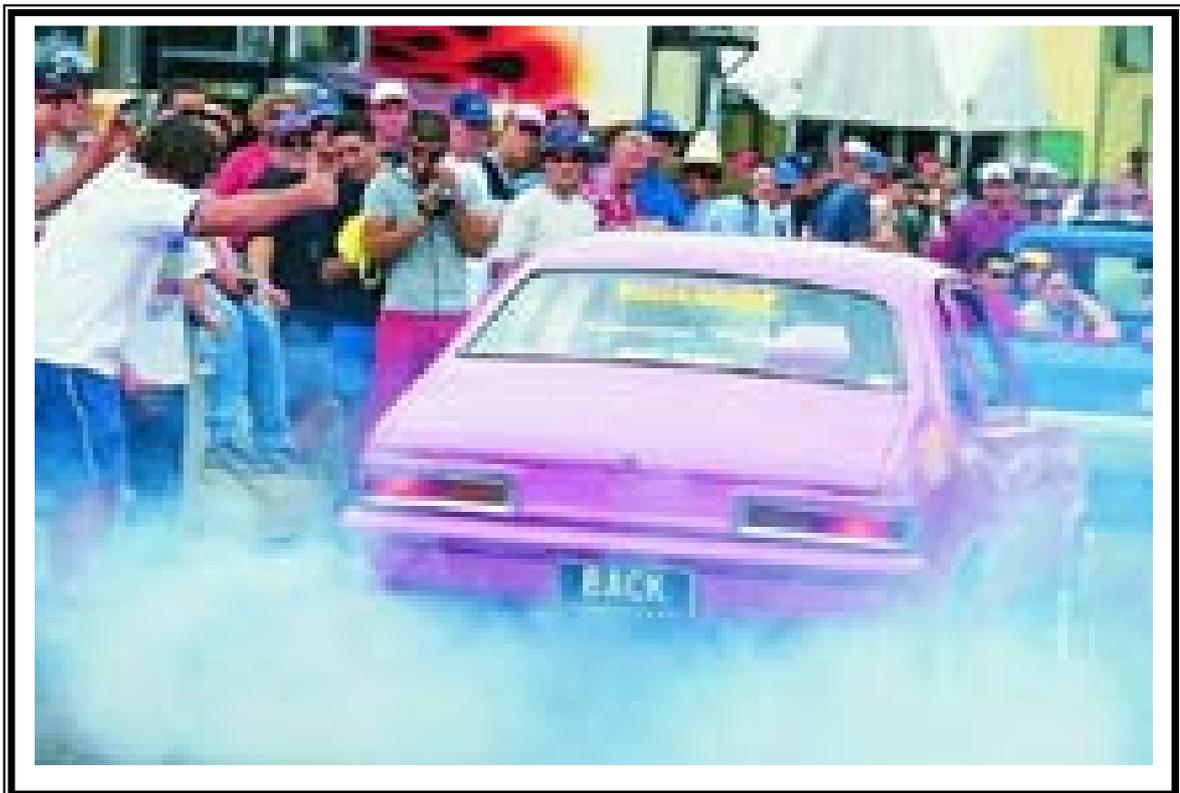
2.3.2. Processes and Outcomes

Focus groups involve organised discussions with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences about a specific topic. This type of interviewing technique is particularly suited to gaining several different perspectives of the same topic. The benefits of focus group research include gaining insights into people’s shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation. This is particularly useful when considering the anticipated impact of this proposal on the young driver.

The main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way that would not be feasible using other methods, for example observation, one-to-one interviewing, or questionnaire surveys. These attitudes, feelings and beliefs may be partially independent of a group or its social setting, but are more likely to be revealed via the social gathering and the interaction which being in a focus group entails. Compared to individual interviews, which aim to obtain individual attitudes, beliefs and feelings, focus groups elicit a multiplicity of views and emotional processes within a group context. Compared to observation or questionnaires, a focus group enables the researcher to gain a larger amount of information in a shorter period of time.

The outcomes of the focus groups will also show whether the participants' responses to the proposed restrictions change from those in the questionnaire as a result of listening to the focus group discussions.

Focus groups are also particularly useful when there are power differences between the participants and decision-makers or professionals as is the case with this study.



3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Introduction

A major literature review of graduated licensing has recently been published by Monash University Accident Research Centre (Senserrick & Whelan, 2003⁽⁷⁾) and a similarly comprehensive review will not be repeated here. That review deals principally with the development and application of graduated licensing in the USA and New Zealand and the effectiveness of the measures adopted, and considers the potential for application of those measures in Australia. Those findings will be dealt with in this review and related to other, recently published literature on the subject.

3.2. Graduated Licensing

Graduated licensing refers to methods of imposing staged restrictions on learner and novice drivers in order to introduce them to the driving task in a manner that reduces risks as far as possible, until a stage is reached where the novice can be expected to perform with reasonable competence and safety. Graduated licensing operates on the premise that driving skills, especially cognitive skills, are best learned through gaining experience⁽⁸⁾, and that the safest way to achieve this is by restricting exposure most while the learner is least experienced and relaxing restrictions as experience is gained. Senserrick and Whelan⁽⁷⁾ identify four models in use in Australia, but the general structure is a learner phase, in which the novice must be accompanied by a supervising driver, an intermediate phase in which the novice may drive unaccompanied but subject to a range of restrictions, and a full licence phase in which all novice related restrictions are removed and the new driver operates under the same driving conditions (eg demerit points, blood alcohol concentration requirements) as the remainder of the driving population.

3.3. Crash Risks – the Reason for Graduated Licensing Programs

The crash risk of novice drivers has been outlined many times and in many contexts (see Introduction). Suffice it to say in this context that young drivers are over-represented in total with respect to other driver age groups and with respect to conditions that are high risk for all drivers, such as at night and at weekends. Both youth⁽⁸⁾ and inexperience⁽⁷⁾ are to blame and inflate the effect of other risk factors. Further, analysis of data on crashes involving novice and more experienced drivers shows that, aside crashes directly related to youthful recklessness, there is not a great deal to distinguish the crashes that novice drivers have from those of older drivers (McDonald 1994 in Smith, 2002⁽⁸⁾). Young people may be over-represented for reasons of exposure, or because their behaviour or the errors they commit are compounded by less well developed cognitive and judgement skills, or by motivation, peer pressure and other age specific factors.

3.4. Young Driver Safety Deficiencies

Lack of driving skill is probably less a contributing factor than is commonly thought. Christie⁽⁹⁾ noted that driving skill deficiencies have been found in less than 5% of crash involvements while Sabey (see Smith, 2002⁽⁸⁾) concluded that 95% of crashes result solely or partly from human error. In many instances those 'errors' are likely to be failures of attention or anticipation or observation; that is, failures of application and not of ability.

Having said this, several researchers are of the view that novice drivers typically have deficiencies in higher-order skills and capacities. Mayhew and Simpson⁽¹⁰⁾ identified empirical research support for eight skills and capabilities that are central to reducing the risk of collision for young drivers. These are:

- Steering control
- Speed control
- Parallel processing/multitasking - skill integration
- Visual search/scanning
- Hazard detection
- Risk assessment
- Decision making
- Risky lifestyle and risk taking.

Harrison⁽¹¹⁾ suggested that hazard perception and ability to correctly observe what is in the driving environment might be candidates for attention:

“Some of the characteristics of novice drivers that are thought likely to increase crash risk include peculiarities in the weighting given to various potential hazards in the road environment, the foci of visual scanning, and poor levels of attentional control and situation awareness. These could all conceivably be the appropriate targets for training efforts for novice drivers” ... “[these] characteristics ... that are associated with crash risk in inexperienced drivers are for the most part characteristics that are more prevalent or more characteristic of less-experienced drivers”⁽¹¹⁾.

Nearly all of these (eg at least six out of Mayhew & Simpson's eight factors) point to both youth and lack of experience as the basic concern.

3.5. Graduated Licensing and Crash Reductions

In their review Senserrick and Whelan⁽⁷⁾ assessed various graduated licensing initiatives and measures and reported the following findings. These are drawn directly from their review. Firstly, five measures showed clear association with crash reductions:

- Increasing the minimum learner period (which consequently increases on-road supervised driving experience).
- Night-time driving restrictions for intermediate-licensed drivers.
- Passenger restrictions for intermediate-licensed drivers.
- Mandating a zero BAC limit for both learner and intermediate-licensed drivers.

- Mandating seat-belt use at all times for both learner and intermediate-licensed drivers.

There was theoretical support for achieving the desired increase in the minimum learner period by the following means, but the relative merits of these initiatives have not yet been fully evaluated:

- Mandating a minimum learner period.
- Lowering the minimum learner age while maintaining the intermediate licensing age.
- Raising the minimum intermediate licensing age to extend the learner period.

There was theoretical support for the following Graduated Licensing Scheme (GLS) initiatives and some research suggesting benefits, but the initiatives have not yet been fully evaluated:

- Extending the intermediate licence period by increasing the minimum period or raising the minimum age for full licensure.
- Requiring a good driving record for progress to full licensure (e.g. extending the intermediate period following licence suspension).
- Lowering the demerit point threshold for intermediate-licensed drivers.

Results regarding effectiveness are currently limited, inconclusive or unknown for the following GLS components:

- Including attitudinal/motivational issues in graduated education, instruction and training programs (within GLS models only).
- Mandating minimum supervised driving hours for learner drivers.
- Allowing lengthy learner permit tenure and no fees to renew permits to discourage early licensure.
- Mandating supervisory driver requirements, including minimum age and driving experience, BAC limit and absence of recent licence disqualification.
- Recommending that learner drivers only be accompanied by a supervisory driver in the initial stages of learning, before allowing driving with multiple passengers.
- Restricting intermediate-licensed drivers from driving high-powered vehicles.
- Increasing penalties for driving offences for intermediate-licensed drivers.
- Removing age-based exemptions from GLS restrictions at all stages.
- Mandating display of licence status plates by both learner and intermediate-licensed drivers (e.g. L-plates and P-plates).
- Mandating maximum speed restrictions for both learner and intermediate-licensed drivers (potentially counterproductive).
- Mandating towing restrictions for both learner and intermediate-licensed drivers.

- Inclusion of graduated/multi-staged testing requirements, including knowledge tests, on-road practical tests and assessments, hazard perception tests, exit tests and retesting requirements.

Two GLS initiatives were found to be counterproductive, that is, research showed increased crash risk associated with:

- Education initiatives that encourage early licensure.
- Extensive professional instruction in the absence of sufficient private supervised driving experience.

In addition to these existing GLS components, several initiatives that are not currently included within GLS models were identified in the literature that offered potential new directions:

- Mobile phone restrictions.
- Age and size of vehicle recommendations.
- Education and training methods from fleet initiatives, including peer group discussion and EcoDriving programs.
- Initiatives for recidivists, including education-based programs, alcohol and seat-belt interlocks and vehicle immobilisation or impoundment programs⁽⁷⁾.

Therefore, although much remains to be known about the effectiveness of some graduated licensing provisions many initiatives have the potential, and some have been found, to reduce crash risks. On the other hand some measures, including some that are commonly thought to be beneficial, have been found to be counterproductive.

Care needs to be taken in considering what measures out of the available menu should be introduced. Senserrick and Whelan note that the effectiveness of any individual component depends on other components that are in or to be introduced in the GLS model. Some are necessarily linked. For example, requiring or promoting much more practice and gaining experience in the learner period goes hand in hand with extended minimum learner permit periods, not because (for example) not having a minimum learner permit period is incompatible with gaining more practice, but because having both sends a message that the authorities are serious about the need for more practice.

3.6. Novice Driver Safety and Mobility

All of the measures found to be effective, as well as those for which there is theoretical support if not evidence of benefit, operate by limiting or controlling exposure to crash risks. The only measure that increases on-road exposure – increasing driving experience during the learner permit phase – is heavily moderated by the presence of the accompanying driver and the conditions under which practice is typically taken, and in fact learner permit holders are amongst the safest road users. All intermediate licence phase measures, i.e. in Australia those applied to drivers on Provisional or Probationary licences, control exposure in various ways and to various degrees.

This issue of controlling exposure requires considering in the first instance what controlling or reducing exposure aims to achieve, and secondly the equity and mobility effects of measures. Concerning the aim of controlling or reducing exposure, Senserrick and Whelan⁽⁷⁾ report that UK research has estimated that crash risk in the first year of unsupervised driving is at least 20 times higher than in supervised driving, i.e. during the learner permit phase, and that research in Sweden placed this figure even higher, finding a 33 times greater risk of an injury crash after obtaining an intermediate licence compared to the learner phase.

Safety is always a trade-off against mobility. The more we drive, ride or walk, the more we expose ourselves to the risks of crashing simply by being on the streets and roads and amongst other road users.

So some graduated licensing measures, especially those aimed at intermediate licensed drivers, seek to reduce the risks by limiting exposure in various ways. This is where passenger restrictions and night curfews come in. Banning night driving and carrying peer passengers is not punishing the innocent but attempting to reduce the risks by limiting driving under conditions that past experience has shown to be very high risk. Although night driving and a car full of same-age passengers are conditions under which risky behaviour (skylarking, showing off, drink driving and so on) occurs, risky behaviour is only part of the story. Fatigue, distraction, inattention and driving error are also important risk factors, as are also lack of experience both in general and at night driving.

Senserrick and Whelan point out, therefore, that some graduated licensing requirements and restrictions may mean independence and mobility trade-offs for the novice drivers, their families and friends and the wider community. A night driving restriction might mean parents still have to drive their children to or from places and events, or pay for a taxi, or make arrangements for the young person to sleep over at a party. If no alternatives are available the young person might have to forgo going out, which getting a driver's licence was supposed to facilitate in the first place.

All of these mean that restrictions may simply be flouted because of the inconvenience and the assault on youthful independence, or parents' freedom. It is very easy to simply remove the P-plate, the main indicator that the driver of the vehicle might be subject to restrictions, and chance detection. Senserrick and Whelan point out that graduated licensing scheme restrictions must be balanced against individual and society wants and needs so that the road safety benefits offset the loss of mobility. Therefore, attempts to impose restrictions must balance non-compliance and evasion against the benefits that might be gained in reducing crashes amongst those who will comply.

3.7. Social and Community Support for GLS Measures

An important consideration is the extent to which society as a whole understands and supports the needs for restrictions. The immediate reaction, seen also in our study (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6), is that restrictions are likely to lack community support. However, Senserrick and Whelan reported from their review that this was not the majority opinion, that attitudes to and acceptance of Graduated Licensing Scheme models, and presumably the accompanying restrictions, improve after they have been in place for some time. In North America for example it was reported that graduated licensing restrictions came to be considered both beneficial and sensible, not only because of the safety benefit but because if not reasonably strict, the motivation and incentive to obtain a full licence would otherwise be undermined.

It seems important for there to be good understanding of the risks of night-time driving and being out with a carload of mates. If there is, there is a higher potential for parental involvement, which is important in making restrictions stick in an environment where normal methods of enforcement appear relatively ineffective. Parental involvement was found to be a strong element in North American experience where the licensing age is lower but, as our research showed, it can also have some effect in the Australian environment. Senserrick and Whelan said that a recent US survey showed that a majority of young drivers under graduated licensing restrictions had been able to undertake the activities they wished to and had not been unduly affected by either night driving or peer passenger restrictions.

3.8. Compliance with the Rules

One of the first and most strongly voiced objections to graduated licensing restrictions is that they are virtually unenforceable. A law that cannot be enforced is not only ineffective in itself but influences attitudes to other laws. Realistically, the likelihood of being detected is extremely low, except perhaps in relatively small communities where everyone knows each other. The young driver has only to remove the P-plate to render the likelihood of being pulled over even lower, as it requires the police on patrol to decide if the driver is likely to be under restriction or not. Their job is made even more difficult by widespread perceptions, whether or not founded in fact, that police 'pick on' young drivers. It only remains for young drivers to avoid drawing attention to themselves, which perhaps achieves some of the aims of restrictions.

Senserrick and Whelan report that while non-compliance is widely reported in the US there have still been substantial reductions in crash risk. The value of restrictions may be in their symbolism and in the fact that their existence reinforces parental authority and young people's own preferences. In the US, official enforcement is seen to be of secondary importance to parental control and self-enforcement.

However, this has to be seen, however in the context of lower licensing ages and, therefore, a different parent-teen relationship than may be the case in most Australian States and the ACT. A parent has more direct authority over a 15 or 16 year old than a 17 or 18 year old and this was pointed out by parents in our own study. An 18 year old simply cannot be ordered or forbidden to do something, except perhaps in the one circumstance where the parent's car is used, and the limits to the coercion that can be applied to a 17 year old are very low. The ability of parents to apply sanctions or to require their young people to comply with restrictions depends heavily on the quality of their relationship generally and the moral authority on which they can draw. Unfortunately, it is probable true that this relationship and moral authority is probably least strong in families where teens are more likely to take risks and be defiant about restrictions on their behaviour.

3.9. Equity

One objection to graduated licensing restrictions raised and discussed by Senserrick and Whelan was their application to all young people, including 'responsible' young people who it was believed would not take risks. This was also raised in our own study. It was argued at times very strongly that restrictions punish all for the irresponsible behaviour of a few.

Two other aspects of equity concerns are frequently raised. The first is the effect on young people who have jobs or some educational activities like sporting or athletic training that necessitate their being out, or driving, at times that would otherwise be prohibited because of night driving restrictions. For these, it is usually possible to grant exemptions, even if there is some risk of the exemptions being abused. A second issue is the fact that restrictions impact more heavily on some groups than on others, especially in rural areas where distances are greater and there are even fewer alternatives.

A third concern is the impact of passenger restrictions on designated driver practices. Senserrick and Whelan found that designated drivers tended not to be used much and that even where used, 'designated driver' often meant merely the least intoxicated of the group. However it is clear that safer practices like this should not be discouraged. It is possible that the designated driver can exercise some control, and reduce any potential risks, by (for example) refusing to carry a companion or peer whose behaviour threatens safety. The problem of making provision for designated driver practices requires further thought.

Given the extent to which society relies on the private motor vehicle and to which infrastructure is built around its use, it is essential to minimise or compensate for measures that affect mobility, independence and social interaction. The aim of graduated licensing restrictions is not to curtail activity per se but to avoid the most high risk situations and circumstances at a time when the novice driver is most at risk because of inexperience and the other disadvantages already described. For these reasons there need to be constraints that necessarily affect mobility, but these need to be imposed only to the extent necessary to achieve the objective.

3.10. Scope of Restrictions

3.10.1. Exemptions

Several aspects of scope in terms of exemptions, permitting driving where family members are passengers or in the company of a fully licensed driver and others have already been discussed. Indeed it is not desirable to ban driving at night altogether since this would prevent gaining practice, and driving under safe conditions (with a supervising driver) is to be encouraged rather than otherwise. Equally, it is unreasonable to ban carrying passengers altogether as there is here, too, a practice effect that should not be forgone.

3.10.2. Hours for Restrictions

Senserrick and Whelan's analyses of crash data showed that the period of greatest risk is between about 10pm and about 6am. Therefore night driving and/or passenger restrictions should span those hours. However although curfew hours began at 10pm in some US States, the start time was more often midnight. The later start time dilutes the effect of the restriction, but the later start time probably increases acceptance and compliance. The same probably applies with greater force in Australia given later licensing ages. A night driving or passenger restriction that commenced earlier than midnight would be considered in Australia to unreasonably curtail social activities and could be complied with less than a restriction with a later start.

3.10.3. Duration of Restrictions

The other aspect is the length of time for which restrictions should be imposed. It has been mentioned⁽⁸⁾ that the critical issues in young driver vulnerability are youth and inexperience. Hence restrictions should aim to affect these two problem areas. Senserrick and Whelan reported that restrictions typically applied for drivers under 20 years in NZ and parts of the US. In North Carolina, intermediate-licensed drivers were subject to restrictions for the first six months after gaining their licence, but even with this relatively short period substantial reductions in crashes were reported. Restrictions that are applied with the exceptions suggested in the first six or perhaps twelve months after gaining a provisional licence should have the effect of reducing exposure during the most vulnerable period while permitting some practice under controlled conditions. This would support a general procedure of gradually relaxing requirements during the currency of the intermediate licence.

3.11. Shifting the Problem

Drummond⁽⁶⁾ in the 1990s FORS study discussed the theoretical problem of exposure transfer if night driving and passenger restrictions were imposed. Senserrick and Whelan cited two papers dealing with the same problem. There are several possibilities. A passenger restriction could result in more novices in more cars, which is a high risk outcome. A curfew could result in an increase in young drivers travelling just before the start of the night-time driving restriction and consequent higher crash risks then. Night driving and passenger restrictions could shift crashes to fully-licensed drivers who are driving instead of novices.

The highest risk result of restrictions would be more young people in more cars, since it could result in an increase in exposure in terms of the number of vehicles and novice drivers on the road. However IIHS (1999, in Senserrick and Whelan) concluded for the US that even with this there would be a substantial reduction in fatalities. This was so even with relatively low compliance rates of 20% or so. Similarly, crash analysis undertaken in the US (Williams [1995] in Senserrick and Whelan) found that the small increase in crashes just before the night time driving restriction was more than compensated for by the positive effect of the reduction in crashes in the night time driving hours. A transfer of driving from novice drivers to fully-licensed drivers would result in a reduction in crash risk.

3.12. Conclusion

From this review it is clear that the graduated licensing restrictions contemplated in this study have shown measurable reductions where applied overseas. While they are effective elsewhere, it cannot be assumed that would be similarly effective here. The main and most obvious difference, which has a significant impact on whether or not measures like these can be effective, is the difference in licensing age in Australian States and Territories compared with the experience of the countries studied: 17 or 18 years in most Australian jurisdictions compared with 15 or 16 years overseas. There are bound to be other, more subtle reasons that will require detailed study to unearth and to find answers to.

But there is hope nevertheless. One clear finding is that there needs to be neither a level of police enforcement to put every road user in fear of detection nor high degrees of compliance to achieve measurable benefits. The impact of even a single crash involving three or four or five fatalities is such that it would require a large number of two-occupant crashes, even if there is significant exposure transfer and more young drivers on the road, to offset the benefit of passenger restrictions.

Overseas experience also shows that conventional enforcement is less important than parental enforcement and that the existence of restrictions can back up parental authority and provides an excuse or reason for young people themselves to avoid getting into risky situations. And it is possible that even the different parent-teenager dynamic that occurs at licensing ages of 17 or 18 does not totally preclude the benefit of parental sanctions.

Nonetheless, the effectiveness of these or any restrictions is compromised when there is little visible police enforcement. General deterrence theory suggests that a strong visible police presence is an effective deterrent, especially to offences about which there is some degree of planning or where there is an alternative, like having too many passengers in the car. Blanket enforcement is not economically feasible, but a reasonable expectation that a police patrol car will appear at some point on any evening out, especially late at night, is a strong incentive to not take too many chances.

Finally, it should be emphasised that the basic reason for considering these measures is the relative lack of experience of novice drivers. At this stage and in the present state of knowledge the best protection for young people at the time they obtain their provisional licence is to have had the maximum amount of practice possible, in all kinds of road and traffic conditions including at night, during the learner permit period. This implies substantially more practice than is generally advocated or required at present.



4. STUDENT SURVEY

4.1. Introduction

The student survey was distributed to students attending college in Canberra. The surveys were administered during their pastoral or tutor groups and sent home to the parents via these students. While most government and private schools were approached about the study, only 7 agreed to participate.

4.2. Representation

Three private and four government colleges agreed to be involved in the study. These colleges were:

- St Francis Xavier College
- Radford College
- Canberra Girls Grammar
- Lake Ginninderra College
- Lake Tuggeranong College
- Erindale College
- Canberra College

A good response rate depended in part on co-operation from each college. If they were enthusiastic about involving their students in something that could have an important impact on their life, then they would be likely to encourage their students to participate in the survey and the follow-up focus groups.

A number of colleges said that they had already had numerous enquiries from their students about the possibility of curfews and passenger restrictions in the ACT. This was a result of media attention about studies being undertaken by the NSW Government and their stated intention to introduce these restrictions before Christmas. These colleges were very keen to participate in the study and indicated that they would use the time spent doing the surveys as a basis for discussion of these issues as well other aspects of safe driving.

A total of 4,500 surveys were distributed to students, which represented over half of the target population of college students in Canberra. A 20% response rate, or 900 survey responses, would provide a statistically significant sample of the target population. Students were also given a survey to take home for their parents to complete together with a reply paid envelope and a “consent to be contacted” form.

4.3. Survey Questions

Teachers administering the surveys to the students were provided with information detailing the concept of night driving and passenger restrictions and were asked to discuss this with the students prior to them filling in the survey form. The students were told that the study was seeking feedback on the acceptance of these ideas and their anticipated compliance, and that focus groups would be formed to discuss the issues further.

The surveys were designed to be as short and succinct as possible. The surveys comprised no more than 10 short questions, such as: age, sex, licence type and a few situational questions. Students were asked to answer as honestly as possible and it was stressed that responses were totally anonymous.

An accompanying form gave details about the focus groups that were to be conducted at a later date to explore the outcome of surveys. The respondents were asked to give their names and phone numbers if they were willing to be involved in a focus group. Copies of the forms are given in Appendix A.

4.4. Responses

On completion of the survey, a sample size of 1,407 responses was obtained, which represents 32% of surveys issued to students and 17% of the target population. While it is unfortunate that more students did not choose to participate in the survey, the sample size is statistically representative of the target population as a whole. The trends obtained in subsequent analyses remained consistent even when the sample was randomly halved and then analysed to determine any overt changes in the results from the whole sample.

4.5. Key Issues and Outcomes from the Survey

The key issues arising from the survey results are summarised below. The main points from the survey were:

- Type of licence:
 - 45% learner licences
 - 44% provisional licences
 - 10% no licence yet
 - 1% suspended licences
- 46% of respondents had their own car to drive.
- Only 16% of respondents indicated that they would obey a night-time curfew.
- Only 22% of respondents indicated that they would comply with night-time passenger restrictions.
- 55% indicated that they relied on the use of their car to get to or from work in the evenings.

A summary of the responses to the student survey is given in Table 4-1.

Table 4-1: Summary of Student Survey

	Overall Results	No Licence or Suspended Licence (11%)	Learner Licence (45%)	Provisional Licence (44%)
Do you have your own car to drive?	46% yes		30% yes	71% yes
If you don't, do you have access to one on a regular basis?	70% yes		74% yes	94% yes
Have you done P-off?				9% yes
I will soon				48%
Do you display your P-plates (if you have not done P-off) or L-plates when you drive?			13% no, not always	5% no, not always
Do you sometimes drive after 10 pm?	44% yes		56% yes	37% yes
Do you drive after 10 pm on weekends?	14% yes		8% yes	22% yes
Do you drive after 10 pm most nights/all the time?	23% yes		10% yes	41% yes
Do you travel with 2 or more friends in the car most nights/ every night?			13% yes	22% yes
Do you work in the evenings and rely on the use of a car to get to work?	55% yes	12%	41% yes	80% yes
Would you support a curfew?	16% yes	37%	20% yes	8% yes
Would you support passenger restrictions?	22% yes	38%	24% yes	16% yes

4.5.1. Provisional Driver Results

615 responses were received from Provisional drivers, which accounted for 44% of all responses. The main responses from these drivers were:

- 9% of provisional drivers had done "P-off" and 48% intended to in the near future.
- Of those who had not done P-off, 5% did not display their "P" plates when driving.
- 71% of provisional drivers had their own car.
- Of the 29% who don't have their own car, the majority (94%) had access to one on a regular basis.
- 41% of provisional drivers indicated that they drove regularly after 10pm.

- 80% of provisional drivers worked in the evenings and relied on a car to get to and from work.
- 22% of provisional drivers regularly travelled most nights/every night with 2 or more friends in the car with them.
- Only 8% of provisional drivers said they would obey a night-time curfew if it were implemented.
- Only 16% of provisional drivers said they would obey passenger restrictions if it were introduced.



4.5.2. Learner Driver Results

635 responses were received from learner drivers, which accounted for 45% of responses. The main responses from these drivers were:

- 30% of learner drivers had their own car.
- Of the 70% who didn't have their own car, 74% had access to one on a regular basis.
- 56% of learner drivers indicated that they had some experience of driving after 10pm. 10% drove most nights and 8% drove after 10pm on the weekends.
- 41% of learner drivers worked in the evenings and relied on a car to get to and from work.
- 8% of learner drivers regularly travelled most nights/every night with 2 or more friends in the car with them.
- Only 20% of learner drivers said they would obey a night-time curfew when they had their provisional licence.
- Only 24% of learner drivers said they would obey passenger restrictions if it were introduced when they had their provisional licence.

4.5.3. Suspended Licence Results

Two responses were received from provisional drivers who had suspended licences. One driver had already done P-off and both had their own cars. Both students said they would obey passenger restrictions but not a night-time curfew. Although this group were statistically a very small section of respondents, their comments reflected those given by the other drivers with regards to curfews and restrictions. It was interesting to note that one driver indicated that they had “lost their licence because of a friend”.

4.5.4. Does not have a Licence Results

10% of responses (140) were received from college students who had not yet obtained their learner or provisional drivers’ licences. Of particular concern was that 43 of these students indicated that they regularly drove a car without a licence and when driving had other passengers in the car with them.

- 38% said they would obey passenger restrictions if they were introduced and had their licence
- 37% said they would obey a night-time curfew if it was introduced

4.6. Student Comments

Respondents were asked to comment on restrictions and an enormous variety of comments were received. The main consensus was that the curfews and passenger restrictions would be excessively restrictive, unfair and discriminatory and while a small number would obey these restrictions, the majority thought they were stupid and would not. Many would no longer display their “P” plates and would continue to drive in spite of the restrictions. A summary of the comments given by students in the survey forms is given below.

4.6.1. Curfews

- What if you have to pick someone up after curfew starts?
- Because I’m a rebel
- It unfair and discriminatory. It punishes the good drivers.
- What if there is an emergency?
- Not practical
- Some P-drivers have children. How do they transport them in an emergency?
- Having fewer cars on the road means less pollution
- Bus times are inconvenient
- I have sporting/work/social commitments

COMMENTS

While most comments fell into one of the above categories, a selection of the more relevant (verbatim) comments is given below:

1. "Because there is nothing else to do in Canberra than go out to clubs or visit friends, and how can we get around if there was a curfew? We spend money to use the roads, and to get a licence so we are entitled to drive."
2. "I have a life. Once again a restriction associated by age, once again an assumption every P-plater is a bad driver; once again cops are looking for money, not saving lives! I also do late night deliveries."
3. "My work, music and sport commitments mean I get home after 10pm on most weekends and on a few days of the week. My parents cannot come and get me all the time."
4. "Because I have to work and I am unable to get other transport to and from work in those times (10pm to 6am) (other than a taxi which costs \$10 each time, 3 times a week)."
5. "Because I have a life. There are just as many stupid normal drivers out there. And on a lot of nights I am not home till after 10."
6. "The idea is a silly one. Think about how many people are actually going to obey this curfew."
7. "I wouldn't obey it because that would mean that I'd have no way of getting home when I go out. Then what am I meant to do, sleep in the gutter?"
8. "I often pick up my parents at night because they do shift work."
9. "Unfair, if we can't drive why should others like the elderly who have much worse sight and reflexes than p-platers."
10. "A curfew would be pointless. It won't stop P-platers driving carelessly; it will just make it a lot more difficult."
11. "A curfew is just avoiding dealing with the problem of unsafe driving."
12. "Imposing a curfew such as this will not only put pressure on novice drivers, it will be massively inconvenient for parents who rely on the fact that their children have independent transport."

4.6.2. Passenger Restrictions

- It is an inconvenience
- I give people lifts home
- What is a 21 year-old going to do? Some of them are more stupid than someone my age.
- Some of my friends don't have cars and we need to travel together
- Some of my friends don't have their licence and we need to travel together
- You might live with someone younger than 21
- The friends that I drive around help me pay for fuel. If they didn't do that then I wouldn't be able to go places either.

- We need to learn how to drive with passengers
- I don't have any friends who are over 21
- It is safer to travel together at night
- What about the designated driver system?
- Too inconvenient to take multiple cars

COMMENTS

1. "It is easier to car pool and cheaper."
2. "I take people home from work and there are times when friends are stranded."
3. "Because it imposes the risk that friends might be in danger, can't pick up siblings etc."
4. "I also drive a lot at night because my parents are sometimes over the blood alcohol limit."
5. "As a legal adult and frequent designated driver, I will not give up my right to be with my friends and give help when help is needed."
6. "Car pooling is important for commuting between places. It is also beneficial for the environment."
7. "Unsafe having to catch rides with drunk drivers, disruptive for parents, I have to work!"
8. "There would be no other way to get home and cab prices are too high."
9. "I have no one else to drive me everywhere as I don't live with my parents, have a job at night and I live 1 ¼ hours from Canberra."

4.6.3. General Comments

COMMENTS

Oftentimes students would provide extensive and pertinent comments. Some are given below.

1. "I see full licensed drivers in their HSV's or WRX's doing 140 on the Tuggeranong Parkway, and is every cop going to stop every driver to check if they have a full licence, because we just won't put them on. I am a patient, courteous driver who knows what these words mean and doesn't let time govern my life.

"There are 2 types of motorists on the road which annoy me. The pie eating, beer drinking Holden and Ford drivers who are always rushing, always tailgating and have a knack to think a horn is for indicating speeding is fine.

“The next is elderly drivers who got their licence by driving around for 15 minutes on a straight road with no other traffic. If you are going to impose a restriction because someone “thinks” it is a good idea or the local RSA has made one too many complaints about a bad driver they “think” are P-platers, then first we should test all and every driver who did NOT undertake the road ready program and see if their “experience by age” has either made them slow down or forget what that weird red triangle means....(it’s a give way sign).”

2. “The problem is that students are taught to get a licence, not to drive. Education rather than restrictions is the answer to the problems.”
3. “We can’t be compared to New Zealand because their restrictions are lifted at the age of 17.”
4. “Adults are just as bad as teenagers when it comes to driving and if we get singled out then so should adults – cause they cause accidents too!!!”
5. “How about you just impound cars from lawbreakers instead of punishing everyone.”
6. “Curfew on passenger numbers OK. Curfew on under 18’s perhaps. But in a liberal state, we accord individuals over 18 the right to choose.”
7. “If you take responsibility from us we won’t grow up with responsibilities and to take care of our own actions.”
8. “Too many limits make people do the opposite and you will always have people doing the opposite.”
9. “If this will save lives then I’m all for it. But it will require more police patrolling the roads, and more random checking stations in order to enforce it. There should also be allowances for special circumstances, eg. Single parent with a young baby who may need to be driven to hospital in the middle of the night. Or, you should be able to apply for working allowances, for those who work past 10 and before 6, who can’t get alternative transport. Suggestions: extra allowances through P-off course (rewarding good driving) workers allowances, and other allowances for special circumstances.”
10. “Maybe people who are caught drink driving should get a more serious punishment, because not all P-platers are to blame!”
11. “Its to hard to make it fair, there is lots of different circumstances. Its just not work and social reasons people drive.”
12. “If they put these restrictions on more people will drive without there plates on to make a stand to the government. When a person turns 18 they become legally an adult so shouldn’t they be able to decide if and when they can drive.”
13. “The law should only be enforced on people who are caught doing the wrong thing.”
14. “Make getting P’s a more rigourous process but don’t stop indipendance.”

15. "If these laws come into effect do we have enough police to enforce the rule and how will it be monitored?"
16. "Drivers learn from experience and by restricting their driving time you would be increasing the accident rate not reducing it."
17. "I think the idea of a curfew for P-platers is quite unreasonable because most people with their P's are working out of school hours – at night, it would create an inconvenience and also taking away independence and an important part of growing up."
18. "I resent the fact that anyone should try to remove our civil liberty to drive when we wish. Its unrealistic and unenforceable, perhaps you should attend to the problem of teen drinking instead."
19. "This law would not have any impact on safety, as those who drive unsafely would ignore the laws. It simply delays the inexperienced drivers to a later time."
20. "If you are trying to lower the P-plates death toll, you should do it in other ways like making the licence test more advanced or have one every year or something."

4.7. Summary of Survey Results

Approximately 89% of students that filled in the questionnaire held either provisional or learner driver licences. Two students had suspended licences. Only a small percentage of provisional drivers (9%) had done P-off but about half indicated their intentions to do so in the near future. 70% of provisional and 30% of learner drivers had their own car and the majority of the rest indicated that they had access to one on a regular basis. Almost 25% of drivers indicated that they drove "most nights/ all the time" with 2 or more friends in the car. Over half of the students (55%) indicated that they work of an evening and rely on a car to get them to and from work. 80% of provisional drivers worked of an evening and relied on their cars to get to and from work.

The indicated rates of compliance with passenger and night driving restrictions decreased as the driver became more independent. That is, students without a licence indicated they were far more likely to comply with restrictions (approximately 40%) than those who had either a learner licence (24%) or a provisional licence (8 – 16%). The students indicated that they would be more willing to comply with passenger restrictions than night driving restrictions as the majority of respondents said that they regularly drove after 10pm.

Of concern was the information that 5% of P-platers who had not done P-off did not display their P-plates when they drove and 13% of learner drivers indicated that they did not display their L-plates when they drove. One of the two students with suspended licences said they had lost their licence because of the influence of friends driving with them.

4.8. Summary of Comments Received

The main objection to curfews was that many students had work/sporting/social commitments that finished after the suggested curfew time. Most indicated that they would not obey the curfew or passenger restrictions as it was not practical, was discriminatory and punished good drivers and would be too hard to police. Many indicated that buses did not run frequently enough at late hours and interchanges were unsafe and that taxis were too expensive.

Many students acted as designated drivers for their friends/ family and restrictions could put many people into unsafe situations. It was frequently pointed out that provisional drivers were not the only unsafe drivers on the road and that it was unfair to punish them and not other drivers. If curfews and passenger restrictions were adopted, then it would be very difficult for novice drivers to gain valuable driving experience and would only delay this aspect of their education.



5. PARENT SURVEY

5.1. Introduction

Access to parents relied on students remembering to take the surveys home with them and then remembering to give them to their parents. While it was acknowledged that students may be unreliable when it came to giving notes to their parents, this was deemed to be the most efficient way to reach the target audience. In order to alert the parents that a survey would be coming home to them, an article was prepared for each school's newsletter to inform parents about the study and to let them know that a survey would be coming home to them with their son or daughter.

Lake Ginninderra College, Canberra Girls Grammar, and Erindale College sent the parent surveys home in their newsletters. Parents were given two options for completing the survey. The first option was to fill the survey in and return it in an accompanying reply paid envelope. The second option was to complete the survey online over the Internet and parents were given details or the link in the accompanying letter to the survey. Also attached to the survey was a "consent to be contacted" form, which detailed information about the proposed focus groups. It asked them to provide their name and phone number if they were interested in participating in a focus group to discuss the issues in more detail. Outcomes from this survey were then to be used to direct discussions in the focus groups. Copies of the surveys are given in Appendix B.

5.2. Survey Questions

The letters to the parents outlined the reason for the study and what the researchers wished to achieve – that is, they were told that the study was seeking feedback on the acceptance of passenger and night-time restrictions for their young drivers and their anticipated compliance, and that focus groups would be formed to discuss the issues further. Also it indicated that if these restrictions were introduced then that would have implications for additional involvement of parents in picking up and dropping off their children during the curfew hours. Their reactions and feelings to this were being sought.

The parent survey was also designed to be as short and succinct as possible. The surveys were no more than 10 short questions, such as: what licence type their children had, do they impose restrictions on their young drivers now and what kind, and a few situational questions. It was stressed to parents that their responses were totally anonymous.

An accompanying form gave details about the focus groups that were to be conducted at a later date to explore the outcome of surveys. Parents were asked to give their names and phone numbers if they were willing to be involved in a follow-up focus group.

5.3. Responses

Unfortunately, only 225 parents completed and returned the Parent Survey. While this does not statistically represent the population of parents of novice drivers, the results did give a clear and consistent response to the questions asked. The lack of returned surveys might well be due to many students not giving parents the survey. However, the researchers were restricted to the method adopted for distributing surveys to parents as they could not access parent databases at the colleges because of privacy issues. The method adopted was determined to be the most cost-effective way of reaching parents.

5.4. Key Issues and Outcomes from the Survey

A summary of the 225 responses obtained is given below. The main points were:

- Parents did not generally support passenger restrictions and curfews but were more supportive of passenger restrictions than curfews.
- Parents of learner drivers were more optimistic of successfully achieving curfews and passenger restrictions. Parents were less optimistic once they had provisional drivers.
- Only a small percentage of parents currently impose restrictions on their novice drivers.
- Only a small percentage of parents (29%) dropped off or picked-up their provisional drivers.



Table 5-1: Summary of Parent Survey

	Overall Results	Parents with Learner Drivers (24%)	Parents with Provisional Drivers (45%)	Parents with Provisional and Learner Drivers (30%)
Does your child have his/her own car to drive?	70% yes		73% yes	57% yes
If they don't, so they have access to one on a regular basis?	88% yes		88% yes	85% yes
Do you ever impose restrictions?	24% yes		20% yes	27% yes
passenger restrictions	28% yes		11% yes	23% yes
distance restrictions	24% yes		15% yes	19% yes
curfew	18% yes		12% yes	6% yes
other/combination of the above	42% yes		18% yes	31% yes
Do you ever pick up or drop off your P-plater?	34% yes		29% yes	41% yes
Would you support a curfew?	24% yes	34% yes	24% yes	15% yes
Would you support passenger restrictions?	42% yes	61% yes	40% yes	34% yes
Would these restrictions be successful?	20% yes	30% yes	18% yes	16% yes

5.5. Parent Comments

A summary of the comments received from parents on the survey forms follows.

5.5.1. Curfews

- Not practical
- It unfair and discriminatory. It punishes the good drivers
- What if there is an emergency?
- What if you need them to pick someone up after curfew starts?
- Some P-drivers have children
- They won't display their P's
- They have to learn to drive at night
- Having fewer cars on the road means less pollution
- Bus times are inconvenient
- They have sporting/work/social commitments

COMMENTS

While most comments fell into one of the above categories, selections of the more relevant (verbatim) comments are given below:

1. "My daughter is clear about the risks for example of drink driving. If she chooses to put herself in a high-risk position, it won't be due to ignorance, but rather negligence on her part. At some point you have to let people make their own decisions."
2. "No human being can go against nature. Accidents happen without intention. No one is perfect. No curfew will change that."
3. "If a P-plater is not mature enough to drive properly one particular hour, he or she is not mature enough to drive any hour of the day."
4. "They have to learn to drive at night and practice is needed. If they are not capable of driving at night, then they should not get the licence. Why not give them a licence test/competency requirement at night?"
5. "You either have a drivers licence or you don't. A P-plate is a driver's licence. The car affords my daughter a form of protection after dark. Bus and taxi cost too much. The P-plater must get around like anybody else. Eg: school, to work, to home. Not all P-platers are under 18. Too draconian."
6. "Curfews don't solve problems, education and responsibility of the young people will give them 'life skills'."
7. "Because I trust my kids to drive safely, and I refuse to support an act which takes away their right to choose to drive whenever they want."
8. "The temptation to break it is too great. The 'prohibition' in the USA did not stop drinking!"
9. "The issue is not when they drive rather how they drive."
10. "My children live out on their own."

5.5.2. Passenger Restrictions

- It is an inconvenience
- They act as designated driver
- They pick up/ drop off my other children
- They need to learn how to drive with passengers
- Too difficult to enforce

COMMENTS

1. "Having lived in NZ and seen how effective passenger restrictions have been in helping to reduce accidents, I think it is high time Australia did something about this too. I have 2 more potential young drivers in my family, and would be keen to see safer guidelines for them. It is difficult to implement these restrictions as a parent, but if it was legislated then it would be very helpful."
2. "I am outraged to even imagine that such an imposition may be passed as law. If that happens the only true reason would be for revenue only."

3. "Car pooling for work purposes is a legitimate way of keeping student's costs down. I would also like to see more statistics on this action actually reducing accidents."
4. "There are a number of reasons why P Plate drivers need to drive after 10pm – not all of which are related to partying – eg work, study, group activities relating to study, family responsibilities etc."
5. "P-plate drivers can be any age. We cannot restrict their passengers or impose a curfew on them because of a discrimination of age/ P-plate."

5.5.3. General Comments

- Too difficult to police
- It would impede their experience of night driving
- I don't want to pick them up in the early hours of the morning
- That is treating them like babies and many are adults
- They would restrict their social life
- They won't display their "P's"

Comments

Other general comments provided by parents are given below.

1. "Drivers (L platers) are only taught to get a licence, not to drive. They must be taught vehicle handling under various road and weight conditions – see the improvements for motorcycle licensing."
2. "Irresponsible drivers are probably the type of person to break rules anyway. You would be punishing law abiding responsible P-plate drivers."
3. "There are always renegades and these are young adults with minds of their own."
4. "I don't think legislation will bring about a change in behaviour and attitudes in this instance. The current laws, while reducing drink driving, speeding etc, do not deter the people who create the problems – don't think these restrictions will either."
5. "Would take time for a culture of acceptance to filter through teenage population. Many would simply remove their P's from their cars at night, while others would simply take the chance. I think the reality will be that those who are the risk takers will ignore the curfew, and thus those most likely to crash are still out there driving. The new laws will simply add a few extra charges to their charge sheet when caught."

“If the ACT Government is going to make this work then it needs to take a comprehensive approach. It must be ready and willing to enforce the laws if introduced, it must provide for public transport to extend into the early hours of the morning to provide alternatives for young drivers. It must not let this become a reason to stay in nightclubs until bus services start in the morning, or the curfew is lifted.

“Nor must this be allowed to encourage teenagers to hang about town centres because they have no convenient means to get home. Idle kids in this situation are at risk for violence, drugs and are more likely to engage in anti-social activities (reflecting society’s role in placing them in this situation). The whole issue must be dealt with as a complete solution – for all levels of family economic ability.”

6. “While all drivers are easily distracted, new drivers don’t have the experience to rely on. I would support a restriction on the number of passengers P-platers could take – this could be increased with each year of experience. New drivers with children would otherwise not be able to transport them.”
7. “The concept is appealing superficially, but it is a simplistic solution to a complex problem. The true solutions are in proper competency testing of licence holders to be sure that they are capable of driving in the full range of conditions that they may encounter as a licensed driver. The competency log book system is a good start – much better than the old test, but it should be expanded to cover competencies such as driving at night, driving in the rain, driving with a crowd in the car etc.

“Attitude also needs to be addressed, although I’m not really sure how you persuade a teenager to be sensible and conservative, especially when so many adult drivers set a shocking example on the roads. The Road Ready and “P OFF” programs here in the ACT seem to be a good idea, but maybe they need more – perhaps they need an assignment like the P OFF ones each month for the first year?”
8. “The temptation to break the restrictions and curfews (peer pressure) would come from those with the least to lose (i.e. people who drink) eg ‘do me a favour, just this once’.”
9. “Are you going to rely on parents to ‘police’ it? How are we going to do it? Are you going to have random pulling over of vehicles by police? Police stationed outside clubs etc?”
10. “You can’t take everyone off the road! ACT car fatalities are very low. The distances we drive are relatively short. I do not believe there is a need in the ACT.”
11. “My P licence children are very reliable. Parents should teach their children how to behave and conduct themselves.”

12. “People and not just P-platers don’t obey the laws now (look at the disqualified drivers who still drive). You also have state borders around ACT to consider as some P-platers live in NSW but work and go to school in ACT and vice versa.”
13. “First of all every school aged driver needs driver education such as, how to drive in the wet, dirt roads, snow, and any other hazardous surfaces as well as shown what can happen with distractions such as, music, day dreaming, skylarking around and listening to their supposed matured peers. If I’m paying \$50 or more for my children a lesson to gain their provisional licence I would expect them to be able to drive at any time and anywhere they wish. This curfew should only apply to any persons on Provisional licences that has breached any of our laws such as, drink driving, causing accidents, speeding and disobeying road rules to put lives at risks. Every parent should teach their children to respect the law and other lives and this would not need to happen.”

5.6. Summary of Survey Results

Responses from the parent survey were separated into 3 categories – parents whose children had learner licences only (24%), parents whose children had provisional licences only (45%) and parents with children that had provisional and learner licences (30%).

70% of their children had their own car and the majority of the rest (88%) had access to one on a regular basis. While almost 25% of parents indicated that they imposed restrictions on their children when driving, these restrictions were mainly passenger and distance restrictions. Only 18% indicated that they imposed night driving restrictions. As expected, 34% of parents said that they dropped or pick up their P-plater on a regular basis.

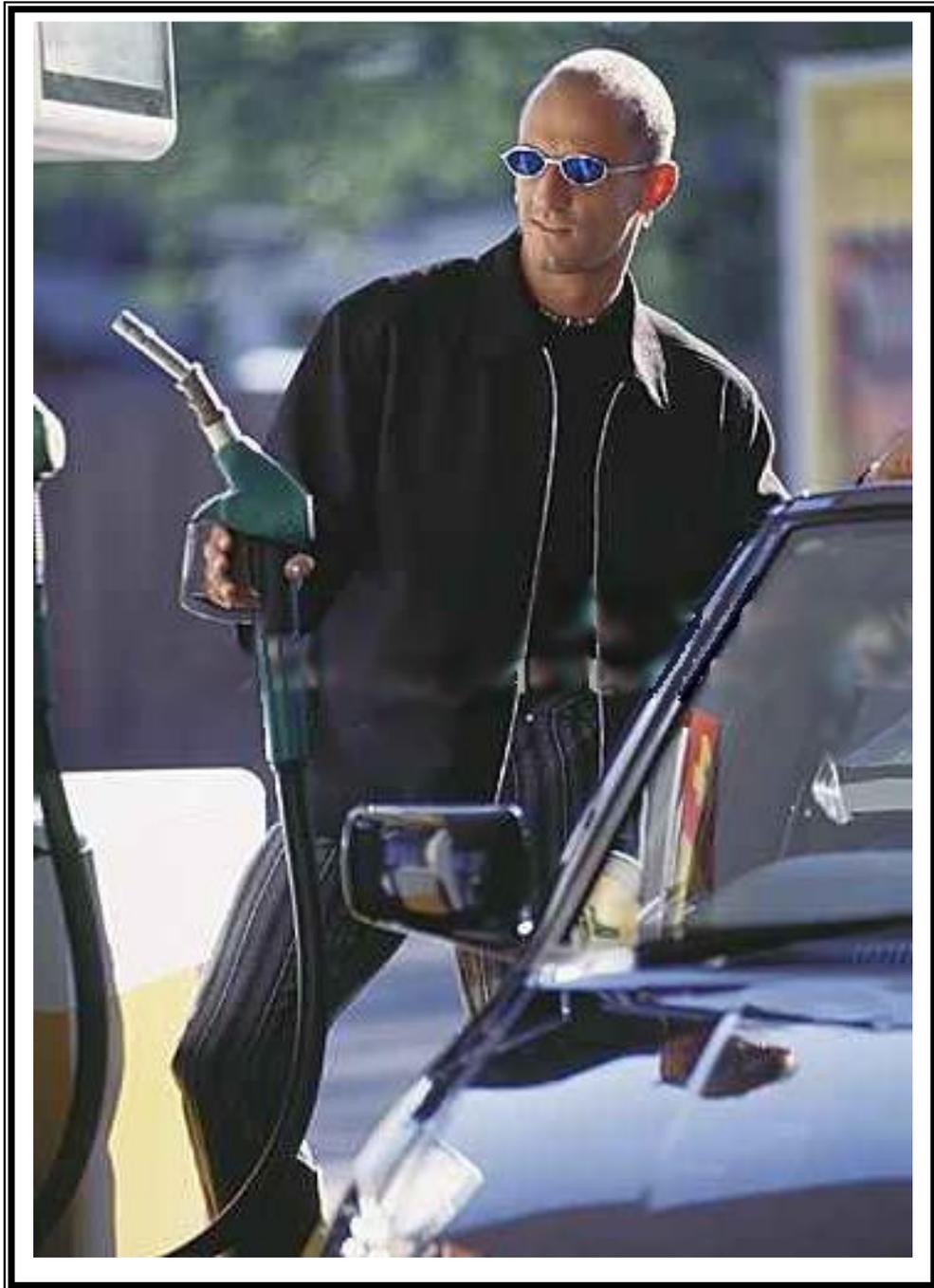
Parental support for passenger and night driving restrictions decreased as their child/ren became more independent and they were more supportive of passenger restrictions (42% overall) than a curfew (24% overall). Parents of students with a learners licence were more supportive of passenger restrictions (approximately 61%) than those whose children had either a provisional licence (40%) or both learner and provisional drivers licence (34%). Only 20% of parents thought these restrictions could be successfully implemented.

5.7. Summary of Comments Received

Parents’ comments generally reiterated those of their children. The main objection to night driving restrictions was that many students had work/sporting/social commitments that finished after the suggested curfew time. Most stated that they felt these restrictions were impractical, discriminatory and punished good drivers and would be too hard to police. Many parents indicated that bus times were inconvenient, particularly late at night and that interchanges were unsafe and taxis too expensive. A significant number of parents indicated that they were very happy now their children had their provisional licences as that gave them independence and they no longer had to get up in the middle of the night to pick them up.

Parents frequently stated that they knew their children and trusted them completely to drive in a safe and responsible manner and to not be influenced by their peers. They said that they have told them not to take other children in their car if they thought they would be a “bad” influence and expected their children to obey them.

In addition, many of their children acted as designated drivers for their friends and family and restrictions could put many people into unsafe situations. They also relied on their provisional drivers to pick up or drop off younger siblings.



6. FOCUS GROUPS

6.1. Introduction

As outlined in the Methodology section, those students and parents who filled in the “Consent to be Contacted” form, were contacted by telephone and their willingness to still attend either a north or south-side focus groups ascertained. Combined student and parent focus groups were not deemed to be viable as it was felt that the presence of a parent might inhibit candid responses from teenage stakeholders. At the parent focus groups, representatives from various relevant stakeholder groups were also invited from:

- ACT Department of Urban Services, Road Safety Management
- Australian Federal Police, Queanbeyan Police
- School and college representatives (eg those responsible for managing and running Road Ready, school principals)
- ACT Department of Education and Training
- Driving instructors
- Insurance agencies, including NRMA
- Road Ready Plus, the post-licence training program available in the ACT (known as P-Off)
- Representatives were also invited from relevant government agencies in Queanbeyan such as the Southern Area Health Services and the Road Safety Officer from Queanbeyan Council.

6.2. Processes and Outcomes

Focus groups involve organised discussions with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences regarding a specific research topic. This type of interviewing technique is particularly suited to gaining several different perspectives about the same topic. The benefits of focus group research include gaining insights into people’s shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation. This is particularly useful when considering the anticipated impact of this proposal on the young driver. Each group ideally contains between 6 and 8 people as well as a moderator whose role is to guide the discussion.

The main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents’ attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way that would not be feasible using other methods, for example observation, one-to-one interviewing, or questionnaire surveys. These attitudes, feelings and beliefs may be partially independent of a group or its social setting, but are more likely to be revealed via the social gathering and the interaction which being in a focus group entails.

Compared to individual interviews, which aim to obtain individual attitudes, beliefs and feelings, focus groups elicit a multiplicity of views and emotional processes within a group context. Compared to observation or questionnaires, a focus group enables the researcher to gain a larger amount of information in a shorter period of time.

In particular, the outcomes from these student and parent focus groups will show whether the participants' responses to the proposed restrictions change from those in the questionnaire as a result of listening to the focus group discussions. Focus groups are also particularly useful when there are power differences between the participants and decision-makers or professionals, as is the case with this study.

6.2.1. Format of Focus Groups

Each focus group followed a similar set agenda with the evening starting at 7:30 pm and aiming to finish by 9pm. However, it was found that the focus group tended to run overtime when parents or students got involved in the topic under discussion. The format for the evenings was:

- Welcome
- Format for the evening
- Summary of findings from background research
- Summary of findings from student and parent surveys
- Break up into focus groups
- Return to give summaries of each groups discussions
- Drawing together and summary of overall findings from the evening.
- Conclusion.

6.3. Student Focus Groups

Student focus groups were held on 20th October at Lake Ginninderra College in the north and 27th October at Erindale College in the south. 26 students indicated that they would still like to come to the north side focus group and 95 indicated that they would like to attend the south-side focus group.

On the evenings of the focus groups, three students attended the one held at Lake Ginninderra College and six students attended the one at Erindale College. Despite the disappointing turn out of students, an interesting and informative discussion was held with each group. Attempts were later made to hold another focus group session at Lake Ginninderra College during a lunchtime period. However, the proposed timing for the focus group given student exams and the fact that Year 12 students were no longer attending college full-time could not be satisfactorily resolved and was not followed up.

6.3.1. Summary of Findings from Student Focus Groups

The initial general discussion with participants centred on any restrictions that their parents might make when they went out in their car and what kind of restrictions those might be. Did they understand why restrictions might be imposed? Did they think having passenger restrictions and curfews late at night mattered?

The students indicated that they understood why State and Territory Governments might want to impose such restrictions but felt that it was not fair that the majority who did the right thing should be affected by the minority who didn't. The students also indicated that their parents already often imposed some sort of restriction on them with regards to time and not drinking alcohol and whom they could take and they felt that was sufficient.

It was interesting that some of the young women felt that it would be unfair to impose restrictions only on young male drivers (as suggested by some parents in the parent focus groups) as they felt that they were often much worse drivers than the men. They said that their male friends took much better care of their cars and drove them more carefully than young women drivers who tended to think of a car as something to get them somewhere and didn't worry about maintenance or how to drive it until it broke down.

In a similar vein, comments were made that when they drove with their parents, young female drivers often drove very circumspectly and well within the speed limit but that it was a very different story when they were with their friends. They frequently had ongoing conversations with back seat passengers and turned to look at them over their shoulder as well as sending text messages from their mobile phones whilst driving. They said that their male friends tended to drive the same way regardless of who was with them.



6.3.2. Passenger Restrictions

A general discussion initially considered the implications of passenger restrictions for first year P-platers, particularly how to make it work and how that would affect such arrangements as “designated drivers”.

Students felt that limiting passengers would mean that more cars would be on the road more often with more young people who had been drinking. Having a designated driver meant that fewer cars were on the road and that those drinking didn't have to worry about driving.

6.3.3. Night Driving Restrictions

A discussion on night driving restrictions centred on how to make this enforceable for first year P-platers, and there were concerns about exemptions for people who work and whether it was a feasible option. Some students said that if a curfew was introduced, then they would very reluctantly obey the restrictions but it would have considerable consequences for them and would very much limit the things that they could do. Some pointed out that their parents would not pick them up from parties in the early hours of the morning and they would be extremely reluctant to catch a bus no matter how convenient the bus timetable and route was. This was particularly the case for young women because they felt that they would be placing themselves in a risky situation by using public transport. In a similar vein, young women usually travelled together to parties because they felt safer in a group and that someone would be less likely to harass them on the road if there two or three in the car. Also they tended to look out for each other to make sure they got home safely.

With regard to seeking an exemption to be able to travel during the curfew, participants pointed out that there would be many ways in which a person could get around it. For example - a person could start a sport and get an exemption to travel during curfew and then drop the sport or they could get an exemption for work and use it when they were not going to work. Other points raised were:

- How would a policeman know if the novice driver was on their way home from work or on their way home from a party?
- Drivers would just take off their P-plates and use back streets.

6.3.4. Other Initiatives

Participants were asked whether there were any other initiatives they thought could be introduced to reduce the risk of serious injury and crashes in their age group so that passenger restrictions and curfews did not need to be introduced. Some of their ideas included:

- Having specified drag route for drivers to use, as this would reduce the likelihood of them using other roads to do burn outs and spins.
- That there was a strong need for more driver training and education. They felt it was too easy to get your licence using the logbook method. One young woman said that she had passed but had been told by her instructor never to do reverse parking, as she was hopeless at it. Another said that she had never had any night-time experience and another no experience in wet weather.

- If night driving and passenger restrictions were introduced then only have them for the first 3 months so that they could get experience driving but know that the restrictions would not be long term. This would make it easier to comply with. If at the end of three months the driver had had no problems, then they could ignore the restrictions and/or get extra points on their licence.
- They suggested that double demerit points for all drivers be introduced between the hours of 12 and 4am. Most young drivers were very concerned with their “hip pocket” and double demerit points and fines would be an effective way of getting their compliance.
- If night driving and passenger restrictions were introduced, then the money saved by insurance companies and the community from the reduced cost of accidents should be put into heavily subsidised taxis as bus interchanges were not safe at night and this would make young people less likely to use their cars illegally in the evenings.

6.4. Parent Focus Groups

Parent focus groups were held on 19th October at Lake Ginninderra College in the north and 26th October at Erindale College in the south. 30 parents and stakeholders indicated that they would still like to come to the north side focus group and 40 indicated that they would like to attend the south-side focus group.

On the evenings of the focus groups, 12 parents and 3 stakeholders attended the one held at Lake Ginninderra College and 19 parents and 7 stakeholders attended the one at Erindale College. Each discussion group in a focus group meeting ideally has between 6 and 8 people. Because there was good attendance at each venue, an interesting, informative and sometimes heated discussion was held with each group. A summary of the findings for the parents and stakeholder’s focus groups follows.

6.4.1. Summary of Findings from Parent Focus Group

The discussion format for the parents and stakeholders focus group followed that of the student groups. An initial general discussion with participants centred on any restrictions that they make when their novice drivers went out in their car of an evening and what kind of restrictions those might be. Did they understand why restrictions might be imposed and what the implications would be for them as parents? And did they think having passenger and late night driving restrictions mattered?

The parents indicated that they understood why State and Territory Governments might want to impose restrictions but felt that it was not fair that the majority who did the right thing should be affected by the minority who don’t. Some parents felt very strongly that their daughters were very good drivers and shouldn’t be punished because of young male drivers bad behaviour. The parents also indicated that they already often imposed some sort of restriction on their novice drivers particularly if the child was using the parent’s car, such as not being allowed to drive to the coast with their friends. One parent said that they did not allow their child to drive their car unless they had the required car insurance excess in their bank account to pay for the excess should they have an accident.

Generally parents and stakeholders felt that these restrictions couldn't be practically implemented and would be too difficult to enforce.

Parents and stakeholders pointed out that many novice drivers were adults as they were over 18 years of age and often had families of their own. They questioned what right we had to be able to send these people to war to protect our country but in the same breath tell them that they are too inexperienced to drive at night with passengers. What were they to do if they had an emergency situation with one of their family members? How would they get them to hospital or seek other help if they could not take them in a vehicle?

It was often stated by parents and stakeholders that experience was a great teacher and that we as parents often learnt how to deal with dangerous driving situations by being put into that situation and having to learn to deal with it. If we continue to restrict our children and limit their driving experiences with night driving and passenger restrictions, then this would be counterproductive as they do not have the opportunity to learn how to deal with different and often difficult driving situations. One way around this would be to have more driver-training particularly at night, in difficult driving conditions and to make them experience such situations as sudden short-distance braking in a safe, controlled environment.

Drugs and alcohol issues were changing in our society and any restrictions had to reflect those changes. Education about the effects of alcohol on a person's ability to drive was very extensive but many young drivers now preferred to take drugs and drive rather than to drink and drive. They felt that this also needed to be explored and appropriate changes made. The effects of fatigue and the dangers of distraction particularly with the use of mobile phones in cars should also be major education topics for all drivers. Restrictions should be about harm minimisation with appropriate guidelines rather than just knee jerk reactions to certain events.

6.4.2. Passenger Restrictions

A general discussion initially considered the implications of passenger restrictions for first year P-plates, particularly how to make it work and how that would affect such arrangements as "designated drivers" and how this would impact upon parents who might have to get up in the early hours of the morning to fetch their children home. Some parents indicated that they were more than happy to continue to do this but many others (as indicated in the parent survey) stated that they had no intention of picking up their children once they had their licences.

Parents and stakeholders felt that these measures would be extremely difficult to implement and that police presence on the roads would have to be greatly increased to make it effective. There was the chance that young people could hide in the boot of the car to escape detection and thereby put themselves at even greater risk.

Most social activity takes place in the evening and generally there tends to be a higher occupancy in cars of an evening than during the day. Tiredness could be a significant factor influencing safe driving behaviour. Some parents felt that this generation was generally far more responsible about driving and were better educated than most of the adults in the focus groups had been at the same age.

With regards to designated drivers, parents stated that one young person was usually preferred as the designated driver when a group went to a party. If passengers were restricted then a young woman may find herself in a situation where she does not feel safe at a party but cannot go home or leave with friends. Parents stated that they did not want their daughters to use public transport as they felt that was even more potentially dangerous.

Some ways of overcoming these problems could be to give their son / daughter money for taxi rides home; drive them to / from the venue or to make arrangements to have them sleep over at the party. However, even very short taxi rides can be very expensive and young people in the novice driver age group generally have a very active social life and often attended two or three parties each weekend. This would make using taxis prohibitively expensive. If this idea was to be seriously considered then a substantial taxi subsidy may need to be introduced.

6.4.3. Night Driving Restrictions

Discussions about night driving restrictions centred on how to make them enforceable for first year P-platers; what about exemptions for people who work and whether it was a feasible option. It was generally felt that although the idea of a curfew was OK, the cost of policing the restriction would be exorbitant and that only a very small percentage of people would benefit (that is, be saved). It was felt that the drivers who would put themselves in danger with their driving style would also continue to drive during the curfew and that this could potentially lead to dangerous pursuit situations. How could police stop them from driving?

With regards to seeking an exemption to be able to travel during the curfew, participants pointed out that there would be many ways in which a novice driver could get around it. In addition to that, the majority of provisional drivers have evening jobs because they are cheap to employ and this requires them to drive after midnight, and would therefore need an exemption. How would a policeman know if the novice driver was on their way home from work or on their way home from a party? Also if a curfew was introduced, then young drivers may rush to get home to beat the curfew and this could lead to accidents resulting from excessive speed.

6.4.4. Other Initiatives

Many parents and stakeholders felt that something could be worked out but that it would have to be “sold” very well to the target audiences – that is parents and novice drivers. Parents and stakeholders were asked whether there were any other initiatives they thought could be introduced or seriously considered. Some of their ideas included:

- That there was a great need for more driver training and education, not only for the novice driver but also for the parent who is teaching the novice driver. They did not feel that defensive driving courses were necessarily the best way to go as often what was learnt in that type of course was quickly forgotten and then could make the young driver overconfident of their abilities when they found themselves in a dangerous situation. There should be an area set aside where young people could learn and practice defensive driving as often as required.

- If restrictions were introduced then only have them for the first 3 months so that they could get experience but know that the restrictions would not be long term. This would make it easier to comply with. If at the end of three months the driver had had no problems, then they could ignore the restrictions and/or get extra points on their licence.
- They suggested that double demerit points for all drivers be introduced between the hours of 12 and 4am. Most young drivers were very concerned with their “hip pocket” and double demerit points and fines would be an effective way of getting their compliance. Alternatively you could have incremental demerit points for all drivers at this time ranging from smaller to bigger depending on the seriousness of the offence.
- It was suggested that heavier fines be introduced for provisional drivers for driving offences and breaking restrictions.
- It was suggested that the size to power ratio of a car be strictly limited for novice drivers.
- Use the money saved by reductions in deaths and serious accidents to provide free buses that were not restricted to particular routes and subsidised taxis.
- Restrictions could be imposed on young drivers who have already been booked for a driving offence or had an accident. Alternatively if night driving and passenger restrictions were introduced, and a novice driver was caught breaking them, then they could face an immediate loss of licence.



7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1. Introduction

The active phase of the study coincided with discussion of young driver safety in local and national media over an extended period. In November 2004 after some months of prior discussion, the NSW Government released a discussion paper on young driver safety issues and announced that it might introduce some restrictions (possibly passenger and vehicle power restrictions) before Christmas 2004 if there was significant public support. In the event, this did not happen. So this study took place at a time when the subject was already prominent in peoples' minds. This was so even though the study was to take place in the ACT, where the Government had announced that there were no plans to introduce further young driver measures, and especially passenger and night driving restrictions. This was reiterated in the survey background information provided.

As the study team discussed participation with the colleges, several indicated that they had had inquiries from their students about the possibility of restrictions, and some proposed to discuss the issues together with other aspects of road safety education. ACT high schools and colleges have an active road safety education curriculum, and indeed pre-licence education and preparation in the ACT takes place in the school system under the 'Road Ready' program.

It should be recognised at the outset that our study is not without bias. In the first instance the study population itself – college students and their parents in the ACT – may not be representative of the Australian population as a whole. The ACT population in general has a higher income, and a higher incidence of tertiary education, than other parts of Australia. The ACT schools-based road safety and driver licence preparation curriculum will influence views and awareness of road safety issues. Secondly the study methodology, involving surveys to be completed and returned voluntarily, selects for a set of the population that completes such surveys in the first place (selecting against those who do not) and has the verbal facility to consider issues and articulate ideas. Thirdly the survey respondents represent a sub-set of even this group in that they are people who consider the issue (passenger and night driving restrictions, or young driver safety more generally) to be worth their attention.

The same applies even more strongly to participants in the focus groups. Agreeing to be contacted for and participating in an evening focus group implies a level of interest in the subject and a preparedness to leave normal activities to take part. It is perhaps disappointing if not surprising that so few of those who indicated that they intended to come to the focus groups, especially students, did appear. Despite the response rate and the population and sample bias outlined above, it was of interest that those who did turn up were prepared to debate the issues, even from a position of rejecting the idea. There was no suggestion from parents or students, in either surveys or the focus groups, that participation indicated a predisposition to favour passenger or night driving restrictions: rather the contrary.

7.2. Findings

The most salient point to arise from our research is that what is understood to be the prevailing view about passenger and night driving restrictions – that they are likely to be unpopular and rejected by a majority of those affected – is confirmed. Amongst respondents to the surveys and participants in the focus groups the majority rejects both measures, and night driving restrictions especially strongly. One thing the study achieved was to articulate reasons why exposure reduction measures are unpopular, which through the constraints of treatment in the media are rarely articulated in such a detailed way. In fact, the way in which the issue was discussed in the focus groups seemed to suggest that both students and parents relished the opportunity to debate and explore the issues.

The ideas expressed by students and their parents, especially the latter, were impressive in their range and depth (see Chapters 4 and 5, especially the ‘general comments’ in each, and the outcome of the focus group discussions in Chapter 6). Several themes emerged from both the surveys and the focus groups. For the sake of convenience they are dealt with together. The main themes were:

- Passenger and night driving restrictions are unenforceable
- Passenger and night driving restrictions are unfair, prevent normal social activities, prevent jobs and sporting activities, prevent carrying out family responsibilities
- All are punished for the behaviour of an irresponsible few
- The law should be enforced on people caught doing the wrong thing (very heavy penalties for those who break restrictions)
- No alternatives (taxi prices too high, public transport unsafe or unavailable)
- Safe practices like designated driver are prevented
- Night driving restriction prevents young people from gaining necessary practice
- Young people are old enough to go to war but not regarded as old enough to drive at night
- Legislation will not bring about a change in behaviour
- Parents already impose some restrictions (where and how far, with whom, late night restrictions).
- Older drivers can be just as irresponsible as young people are made out to be
- Have better and more rigorous training and licensing procedures before allowing young people to be licensed. Teach them driving skills not to get a licence. Answer to the problem is education not restrictions

One parent, who had lived in New Zealand, while acknowledging the difficulties, was keen to see passenger and night driving restrictions introduced in Australia.

7.3. Discussion

This research suggested that there was a very common view that ‘our kids don’t behave like that’, and that the risks applied to others, and given that, why should good and responsible young people be penalised? Why should all be punished because of the irresponsible behaviour of a few? It was therefore apparent that neither young people nor their parents understand the potentially disastrous impact of lack of experience, including the peculiar difficulties of night driving, the effect of fatigue, of distraction or the potential for being the victim of someone else’s drunk driving or mistake. It is not well understood that exposure management measures such as these restrictions are not a punishment but a protection against risks that cannot otherwise be avoided. Further, in focus group discussions some young people admitted that their behaviour away from parents’ influence was not the same as when parents were with them, suggesting that the ‘good’ are not always as good as their parents suppose. Regan and Mitsopoulos⁽¹²⁾ have discussed the influence of different categories of passenger on driver behaviour, highlighting the negative influence of peers on young males.

The general feeling was that night driving and passenger restrictions, despite the ‘unfairness’ arguments, were a good idea in principle but impossible to implement and police. Exemptions would be necessary to allow not only for jobs but for night and early morning sporting activities, chauffeuring younger siblings for similar purposes, and so on. Given that 90% of students in the Student Survey indicated that they had an evening job, it seems likely that many exemptions would have to be granted and could easily be abused. The range and extent of these was considered to have the potential to be an administrative nightmare.

Clearly also the alternatives represent practical difficulties. It should not be forgotten that one motivation for acquiring a driver’s licence is to avoid having to take those alternative measures. Being chauffeured may not be an option and would certainly not be preferred. Public transport is frequently not an option, having insufficient frequency and coverage late at night, and there are often security concerns, especially for young women. Also, public transport will almost invariably take more time and involve waiting and walking, both of which young people will avoid if possible, and which also give rise to safety concerns.

It needs to be remembered that not all groups are equally affected by graduated licensing scheme restrictions. Restrictions will have greater impact in rural areas, where distances are greater (e.g. between neighbouring towns) and public transport, or indeed any alternative to driving one’s own car, is virtually non-existent. There is an economic issue: using the private car is cheaper in the short term, taking account only of immediate out-of-pocket costs, than any other alternative. People in some groups (and in this respect our study respondents are unrepresentative) are less likely to consider the merits of measures that restrict their mobility than to react according to whether the restrictions affect what they want to do. It has to be said also that short term wants are likely to prevail over consideration of the consequences in young people, whatever their background.

For rural areas local authorities and community groups may have to give creative thought to measures that reduce risks but still allow a measure of mobility. For it should not be forgotten that rural, small towns and perhaps outer urban fringe areas have special problems: the incidence of crashes and casualties is higher than in metropolitan areas, drink driving is more prevalent (frequently because of the lack of alternatives to driving) and there are special problems arising from distance and fatigue. One possibility might be to enlist the aid of services clubs to provide volunteer drivers or a community bus.

Several parents at the focus groups expressed their willingness to drive their teenagers to or from venues, or to provide taxi money, to prevent them from being exposed to risky situations. But it should be recalled that this group are self-selected, may have an interest in the issue and the safety of their young people and therefore may not represent the views of parents of novice drivers as a whole. Many parents who answered the Parent Survey indicated that one of the reasons they gave their son or daughter their own car or unlimited access to the family car was so that they did not have to chauffeur them any more. This view could well be held by many more.

Participants in the focus groups felt that there were other ways of reducing novice driver exposure to risks without introducing passenger and night driving restrictions. Some of the alternatives suggested were double demerit points and fines for the hours 12 midnight to 4am; limiting the power, capacity and output of the car young people can drive, more extensive driver education and practice, and using money saved by insurance agencies on reduced payout and premiums to fund free night-time buses and significant taxi subsidies.

Ultimately it was felt that better education was preferable and that if night driving and passenger restrictions became a reality, they would need to be very well 'sold' to novice drivers and their parents.

This is true and is further elaborated below, but it also indicates that many do not fully understand the role of driving practice, and perhaps have more faith than warranted in driver training and education. Although this situation is changing with exploration of new techniques, particularly with respect to risk awareness and risk management, extensive driving practice in all road and traffic conditions, including at night, still remains the best preparation for licensing (ACRS 1996⁽¹³⁾).

Nevertheless there was a willingness to consider the issues. Once our study groups understood that the aim of the restrictions was to reduce the risks in driving situations that are not within their control, the attitude of several of the young people in the focus groups changed, as also did that of some parents. They became more willing to consider how to implement restrictions to make them work than to reject them outright.

Of relevance is the finding of Senserrick and Whelan's study that parental sanction rather than official enforcement is the key to making restrictions work. As has been reiterated, this effect cannot be expected to be entirely replicated here because of the difference in licensing age and hence in the maturity and independence of young people, and in turn the amount of adult control that can be exerted.

The focus group outcomes brought some useful suggestions for consideration. Most of these related to imposing heavier penalties, for example heavier fines and demerit points for any traffic breach during the late night hours. This would deter risky behaviour, as both monetary penalties and the impact of losing more demerit points are felt strongly.

Another suggestion was that if night driving and passenger restrictions were to be introduced, that they should be imposed only for a period of three months, and lifted if there are no problems. There is merit in this idea. Novice drivers are at their most vulnerable in the first months after gaining their provisional licence. It is in that period – and probably six months is a more realistic period than three – that they are without the ‘safety net’ of an accompanying driver and may also encounter driving situations that they have not met during the learner permit period. It is in that period that the impact of sufficient or insufficient practice during the learner permit period is most strongly felt.

A procedure like this would reinforce the point that there are circumstances that are very high risk and that it is these that are being targeted rather than individuals. Restrictions that are applied for a relatively short term with a foreseeable end point stand a better chance of acceptance and compliance than restrictions that appear to stretch endlessly into the future. Even a year is a long time for a young person. If there is a significant benefit to be had in restrictions that apply for only, say, the first six months after the provisional licence is gained, then there is advantage in having them only for that period if compliance is likely to be reasonable for that period.

The findings of this study do offer some hope. There is no doubt that measures that restrict the freedom and independence of young people are unpopular, and that compliance may well be low. At the same time we believe that some will comply, and may discover that the restrictions are not as disruptive of their independence and social life as they might at first believe.

It is highly important, however, and we reiterate, that restrictions be accompanied by public education that links the restriction with the risk and emphasises that it is a matter of safety not punishment, a trade-off of some short term loss of mobility and independence against long term survival. We believe also that education should include reference to the effects of fatigue and sleep deprivation, for which the risks are insufficiently understood and on which young people are especially at risk (Bartlett et al, 2003⁽¹⁴⁾).

This study can only be regarded as preliminary. Our study respondents cannot be regarded as fully representative of the Australian population and it is possible that our findings are more positive than they might be for some other groups. Nevertheless we believe that a good case can be made for at least further consideration.

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Appendix A: Student Surveys

STUDENT Survey on Passenger Restrictions and Night-time Curfews for Novice Drivers in the ACT

NRMA-ACT Road Safety Trust

Anything that you tell us in this survey is totally confidential. We will not tell anyone what you have said - it's private. We are hoping to get a group of people your age to come to a focus group to talk more about these issues. If you are interested in talking with other people your age about this and how it could affect your life, please write your name and phone number on the following page.

Please answer these questions honestly and thoughtfully as they will be used to help decide whether curfews and restrictions will be introduced in the ACT. Thank you.
PLEASE TICK THE BOX WHICH SEEMS TO BE THE BEST ANSWER.

1) Do you have a current drivers' licence? I have a Learner Licence a Provisional Licence
I don't have a licence yet No, I lost my licence

2) If you have a P Licence, have you done "P-Off" yet? Yes No I will soon

3) If you have not done your "P-Off", do you display your P Plates when you drive? Yes No Usually

4) Do you have a car which is yours to drive? Yes No

5) If you don't have your own car, can you drive someone else's on a regular basis? For example, you are able to use your parent's car on the weekend? Yes No

6) Do you ever drive at night after 10pm? Sometimes on Weekends Most nights

7) If a **curfew** was imposed for P-plate drivers between 10pm and 6am, would you obey it? (This would mean that you can't drive during those hours) Yes No
If you said no, why wouldn't you? _____

8) Do you regularly travel with 2 or more friends in your car at night? Sometimes on Weekends
All the time Most nights

9) If **passenger restrictions** were imposed for P-plate drivers between 10 pm and 6am, would you obey it? (For example, you may only be able to have a passenger if they are over 21 years of age) Yes No
If you said no, why wouldn't you? _____

10) Do you work in the evenings and rely on your car to get to work? Yes No

Would you like to make any other comments? _____

If you would you be willing to attend a discussion group with other people your age to talk about these issues, could you please **clearly** write down your name and phone number on the following page.



Thank you very much

Smithworks Consulting



1st Floor, cnr Gladstone & Townsville Streets, PO Box 1654, Fyshwick ACT 2609 Australia
Telephone STD (02) ISD (612) 6280 7533, Facsimile (02) 6280 6535

15 December 2004

Dear Student,

**2004 NRMA-ACT ROAD SAFETY TRUST
STUDY OF THE EFFECT OF PASSENGER RESTRICTIONS
AND CURFEWS ON NOVICE DRIVERS**

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP DETAILS

If you have completed the Survey on Passenger Restrictions and Curfews for Novice Drivers in the ACT, would you be willing to get together with a few other people your age to discuss the effects of these restrictions in more depth?

The **student focus groups** will be held on Wednesday 20th October (north side) and Wednesday 27th October (south side). The aim of a focus group is to have 4 or 5 small groups of people (around 6-8 in each) get together to discuss their concerns, share ideas or offer ways of introducing these restrictions successfully. The focus groups will be informal and will go for 1 to 1 ½ hours.

If you are willing to join one of our focus groups, could you please provide your name and phone number below. We will contact you with details about where to meet and at what time, in early October. Thank you so much for your help. If you have any questions, please contact me on 6280 7533.

Anona Graham
Transport Planner
Traffic Infrastructure Group
SMEC Australia

Name: _____

Phone number: _____



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Appendix B: Parent Surveys

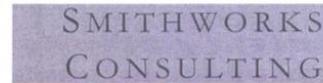
Newsletter article

2004 NRMA-ACT ROAD SAFETY TRUST STUDY OF THE EFFECT OF PASSENGER RESTRICTIONS AND CURFEWS ON NOVICE DRIVERS

SMEC Australia and Smithworks Consulting are doing a study for the NRMA-ACT Road Safety Trust looking at the effect of passenger restrictions and nighttime curfews on young drivers in the ACT. You may have seen stories about these issues over the last few weeks on television or in articles in the local newspapers. The NSW Government is also considering introducing these restrictions later this year. Studies carried out in other countries have shown that these restrictions significantly reduce the number of fatalities and serious injuries for young drivers involved in crashes.

The survey asks young drivers and their parents to discuss how they feel about these restrictions and see if they think they could be successfully introduced in the ACT. Following the survey, we would like to get a number of young drivers, parents and other interested people to come together in focus groups to discuss these issues in more depth. Because this is such an important issue for families, the ACT Department of Education and your Principal have agreed to help us by allowing us to send a survey home for you and your child to fill in. The survey is very short and will not take long to complete. Please take the time to read and complete it when it comes home, as your opinion is very important and the outcomes may directly affect you and your family. Thank you so much for your help. If you have any queries, please contact me on 6280 7533.

Anona Graham,
Traffic Planner
SMEC Australia.



1st Floor, cnr Gladstone & Townsville Streets, PO Box 1654, Fyshwick ACT 2609 Australia
Telephone STD (02) ISD (612) 6280 7533, Facsimile (02) 6280 6535

15 December 2004

Dear Parent,

2004 NRMA-ACT ROAD SAFETY TRUST STUDY OF THE EFFECT OF PASSENGER RESTRICTIONS AND CURFEWS ON NOVICE DRIVERS

SMEC Australia and Smithworks Consulting are doing a study for the NRMA-ACT Road Safety Trust looking at the effect of passenger restrictions and nighttime curfews on young drivers in the ACT. You may have seen stories about these issues over the last few weeks on television or in articles in the local newspapers. The NSW Government is also considering introducing these restrictions later this year. Studies carried out in other countries have shown that these restrictions significantly reduce the number of fatalities and serious injuries for young drivers involved in crashes.

With this survey, we want to get young drivers and their parents to discuss how they feel about these restrictions and see if they think they could be successfully introduced in the ACT. Following this survey, we would like to get a number of young drivers, parents and other interested people to come together in focus groups to discuss these issues in more depth. Because this is such an important issue for families, the ACT Department of Education and your Principal, has agreed to help us by allowing us to send home **a survey for parents**. Year 11 and 12 students have been asked to fill in a similar survey at school.

Because we feel that this is such an important issue for young drivers, we would like to get parents, other relevant people and teenagers to get together to discuss the effects of these restrictions in more depth. To do this we will be holding focus groups. The focus groups will be on 2 evenings on both the north and south side of Canberra. They will be very informal but will seek to get everybody's ideas and feelings on this topic. If you would like to come to one of these groups, please fill in your name and phone number on the separate contact form. I will then ring you in early October to let you know the date and venue.

The survey is very short and will not take long to complete. Please take the time to complete it, as your opinion is very important and the outcomes may directly affect you and your family. You will see that there is a Reply Paid envelope with your forms. Please place your completed surveys (and contact forms if you would like to join one of our focus groups) into the envelope and drop it in a letterbox. If you would like to complete the survey on-line over the internet, then please go to www.smeconline.com.au/ParentSurvey and follow the instructions. Thank you so much for your help. If you have any queries, please contact me on 6280 7533.

Anona Graham
Transport Planner
Traffic Infrastructure Group
SMEC Australia



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PARENT Survey on Passenger Restrictions and Night-time Curfews for Novice Drivers in the ACT

NRMA-ACT Road Safety Trust

Anything that you tell us in this survey is **TOTALLY CONFIDENTIAL**. We are hoping to get a group of parents and other people to come to a focus group to talk more about these issues. If you are interested in joining in a discussion group please write your name and phone number on the following page.

PLEASE ANSWER THIS SURVEY IF YOUR CHILD HAS A PROVISIONAL OR LEARNER DRIVERS' LICENCE
Please tick the box(es) which give the best answer.

1) Do any of your children have a Learner or Provisional drivers' licence?
Please indicate how many - eg...has a Provisional Licence 2

has a Learner Licence has a Provisional Licence
has a suspended licence Why? _____

2) If your child has a P licence, do they have their own car to drive? **Child 1...** Yes No
Child 2... Yes No

3) If they don't have their own car, can they drive someone else's on a regular basis? For example, your car at night or on the weekend? **Child 1...** Yes No
Child 2... Yes No

4) Do you ever impose restrictions on when, where or how they drive? (apart from legal/licence requirements) **Child 1...** Yes No Sometimes
Child 2... Yes No Sometimes

5) What kind of restrictions do you impose? passenger restrictions curfew
distance restrictions other _____

6) Do you ever pick-up or drop-off your P-plater? Yes No Sometimes
Why? To take them to work in the evening (or pick up) Other _____
They are going out and will be drinking alcohol

7) If a curfew was imposed for P-plate drivers between 10pm and 6am, would you support it? (This would mean that you may have to drive them places during those hours). **If you said no, why wouldn't you?** Yes No

8) If passenger restrictions were imposed for P-plate drivers between 10pm and 6am, would you support it? (For example, they may only be able to have a passenger who is over 21 years of age.) **If you said no, why wouldn't you?** Yes No

9) If curfews and passenger restrictions were introduced, do you think they could be successfully implemented? **If you said no, why don't you think so?** Yes No

Would you like to make any other comments? _____

If you would you be willing to attend a discussion group with other parents and stakeholders to talk about these issues, could you please clearly write down your name and phone number on the following page.



Thank you very much

Smithworks Consulting



1st Floor, cnr Gladstone & Townsville Streets, PO Box 1654, Fyshwick ACT 2609 Australia
Telephone STD (02) ISD (612) 6280 7533, Facsimile (02) 6280 6535

31 August 2004

Dear Parent,

**2004 NRMA-ACT ROAD SAFETY TRUST
STUDY OF THE EFFECT OF PASSENGER RESTRICTIONS
AND CURFEWS ON NOVICE DRIVERS**

PARENT AND STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUP DETAILS

If you have completed the Parent Survey on Passenger Restrictions and Curfews for Novice Drivers in the ACT, would you be willing to getting together with a few other parents and interested people (such as Road Ready Co-ordinators, teachers and driving instructors) to discuss the effects of these restrictions in more depth?

The **Parent and Stakeholder Focus Groups** will be held on Tuesday 19th October (north side) and Tuesday 26th October (south side). The aim of a focus group is to have 4 or 5 small groups of people (around 6-8 in each) get together to discuss their concerns, share ideas or offer ways of introducing these restrictions successfully. The focus group will be informal and will go for 1 to 1 ½ hours.

If you are willing to join one of our focus groups, could you please provide you name and phone number below. Please return this form together with your completed survey and your child's completed survey (and their consent to attend a focus group if they are willing) in the Reply Paid envelope provided.

We will contact you with details about where to meet and at what time, in early October. Thank you so much for your help. If you have any queries, please contact me on 6280 7533.

Anona Graham
Transport Planner
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Name: _____

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