

DVSA Cardington.

The new format driving test.

13th July 2017, Chris Porter, from Governing Committee of ADINJC and myself were invited to meet Gordon Witherspoon, Driver Policy Manager, and Graham O'Brien, Policy Advisor (Driver), both of Policy and CDE Directorate at DVSA, to discuss the new format driving test, receive a presentation, a demonstration of the new elements and to have an opportunity to have questions answered.

The main areas covered were "why change the test?" and to see and discuss these changes. While we agreed beforehand to have an open mind, we were both aware that so many of our friends and colleagues were unsure about the new test, we had heard about the basic changes, but there had been so many rumours and apparent changes of briefing, we felt we needed to be told certainly what the new test would be like. Prior to our visit I had expressed concerns to our DVSA hosts about using new technologies (namely the SatNav) on test with people having known (neurological) disabilities, "hidden problems" or just simply with general test nerve and anxiety related problems.

Chris asked if the new test had been demonstrated to SEN groups and Graham said that focus groups had been invited to Cardington to view it. He mentioned dyslexia & dyspraxia were represented, the autistic spectrum and British Deaf Association also attended, but he did not give a complete list.

"The new driving test has been redesigned to better reflect today's modern driving environment".

So what's new?

Independent driving will be extended to approximately 20 minutes of the driving test. DVSA believe the current routes used do not test candidates sufficiently on a mixture of road types and speeds, particularly rural roads with generally a higher incidence of 'Killed or Seriously Injured' (KSI) road traffic incidents, and they felt that longer periods of independent driving (4 from every 5 tests being guided by SatNav), negating the stop / start nature of giving preset instructions would keep the tests moving, enabling driving examiners' to take candidates on longer and more mixed routes. 1/5 tests would still use "following signs for..." and these routes would similarly be extended to 20 minutes.

I asked what they felt about ADIs driving on similar roads, routes and environments as the (new) driving tests. Whilst they would not condone 'copy cat' practicing, they did acknowledge the inevitability that ADIs will elect to drive on similar roads, and there will be benefits by preparing learner drivers to handle these roads much more because of greater driving exposure whilst learning, and this would certainly align the ADIs with the DVSA's stated aim of reducing KSI's on rural roads.

DVSA made no secret of the fact that they understand the presence and use of a SatNav in the car may be a distraction, both in sight and sound. ADIs should experiment with this with their clients and help them understand and manage any distractions. Use of any SatNav model will suffice in this objective.

- SatNav (DVSA's initial model of choice for driving tests is **TomTom Start 52** – it is important to note that DVSA are not endorsing this product, but it best matches their needs following the trials). This model has significantly helped DVSA to more easily prepare new driving test routes (compared with other SatNav models) by using the "record route" feature, which enables them to simply record, save, store and copy a driven route onto an SD card. This can then easily be added to a compilation of routes for each driving examiner's SatNav. The equipment comes with a very sturdy but flexible dash grip mat, and a juice pack discretely attached at the rear, which will power the SatNav, we we're told, for a full day without a recharge. The voice we heard was very soft, the timing of instructions given correctly timed and the graphics on the screen were uncluttered and clear. I have been assured it has been tested to ensure it doesn't intimidate the user with lots of "make a U-turn" instructions if the user misses a turn. In the set-ups, volume, brightness, contrast and colour palette are fully adjustable to accommodate users with special needs and light sensitivity issues (NB these are unlikely to exactly match known syndromes like Irlen or Sjogren's). Diagnosed users will have management solutions in place, but the SatNav adjustments may just help further with their condition. Only time will tell with these points, but I'd suggest ADIs visit the LDTM to examine the SatNav if they have clients with such conditions, and, **in advance of a test**, I recommend ADIs take their client to the test centre to see the LDTM and work through the settings to determine (in advance) the best settings for that client.

- Retained "reverse in private bay park" exercise at DVSA Driving Test Centres. This manoeuvre will remain **unchanged**, so the candidate will be asked to drive into the car park and reverse into a marked bay of their own choice. Depending on the layout of the car park this may be reverse in to the left or right and the candidate may be asked to drive out of the car park to the left or right if there is high demand for use of the car park from other driving examiners.
- Retained "roadside reverse parking", this manoeuvre likewise remains **unchanged**.
- Amended "show / tell". **Show questions** will now be conducted **on the move**. Candidates' will be asked to perform an everyday task whilst driving. The candidate should elect to do this in a safe road and traffic situation. If the candidate fails to operate the controls correctly, they could be awarded a driver fault, a serious or dangerous fault depending on the severity of the error. **Tell questions** will still be asked at the start of the test prior to driving away.
- Addition of "parking in a bay in a public car park". Candidates will be requested (on the move) to drive **forward** into a space on the left or right, then, having parked, reverse out to the left or right, except if reversing into a one-way traffic system, when the candidate will be guided by the driving examiner which way to reverse out and drive away. When in two-way systems the candidate will be invited to make the decision for themselves and then drive away. Prior to instruction we were told the driving examiner would evaluate the area for availability of open bays (i.e. bays with no cars either side) and will decide not give an instruction to park if there are only spaces between cars, as this is deemed too challenging. If a candidate chooses to pull forward between two cars, the driving examiner will not intervene unless the manoeuvring becomes unsafe. If the candidate drives through a space and stops in the "drive through" bay, the exercise will be reset once the candidate has been told that is not what is being asked for.
- Addition of "pull up on the right". Candidates will be requested (on the move) **when it is safe, pull up on the right**. After pulling up and once the driving examiner has evaluated the pulling up and the safety of the road, the candidate will then be asked to "reverse a distance of approximately two car lengths and then drive away returning to the normal flow of traffic when safe to do so". I asked if the road suddenly and unexpectedly became busy, and so they instead pulled up in a safe place on the left, what would happen. We were told the driving examiner would decide if the exercise could continue or if the candidate would be asked instead to drive on (and possibly be asked to do the exercise at another location further along the route).
- Removal of **turn-in-the-road** and **corner reversing**. It was explained that the necessary skills to perform these exercises would be more than adequately tested in the drive-in / reverse-out exercise (which draws on the turn-in-the-road skills), and reverse-in / drive-out (drawing on corner reversing skills), and the necessity to have very high all around visual awareness is heightened because of the choice of location to perform the new manoeuvre in a public car park and when moving off to return into normal traffic flow from the right.

My conclusions (general).

Generally do people welcome and embrace change? There's a saying "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!". As I prepared to meet the DVSA, I was of the mindset that although I believed the current driving test has its many flaws, it does sort of work, I am used to it, and generally it does enable safe drivers to acquire a full car driving license. If it ain't broke, don't fix it, right? But do drivers behaviours change when they no longer have their trusty ADI sat alongside or after they have crossed the elusive finish line and passed their test? (You can answer that).

In my area, Leeds, the driving tests take place in built-up areas, and in these urban areas, and on the surrounding rural areas not currently covered by driving tests, there are a high proportion of serious incidents and, although few in number, an unacceptable number of fatal incidents ([see links below and check your area](#)).

What is the "modern driving environment"? Certainly, if I'm to believe all the postings from your dash-cams on Facebook, there's a lot of very bad driving out there, perhaps a lot of these examples being "near misses", but someone has taught these qualified drivers' to drive, and can I honestly believe that, once my back is turned, will all of my former clients' continue to drive perfectly? Well I'd like to think so, but what about peer pressure (how many of our lessons do we conduct with our clients mates in the back?), road rage (remember your dash-cam footage, other road users, horn jockeys), distractions (not just SatNavs, but radio, music, mobile phones, iPods etc), family (partner, kids, Mum or Dad, and all the "back-seat drivers"), alcohol / drugs, emotional and time management (had an argument / in a rush), and more, all of which fit nicely into the higher levels of the GDE. There's a lot I can do around this area to make my tuition car driving environmentally more like driving in the modern world, with the clear exceptions of alcohol and drug use, which must be done as "tutorials".

I've heard so many ADIs speak in opposition to the proposed changes, myself included, perhaps because of the perceived intentions of DVSA, introducing changes into the driving test that are not best practice and / or are contrary to the Highway Code. For the first time, I felt DVSA engaged with me today and on the level, explained why, and I found I could agree. DVSA know that driving forward into a parking bay in a busy car park, then reversing out is high risk, and they know that parking overnight contraflow is not best practice, but said drivers do so on a regular basis. Having heard many ADIs speak up about these practices, after being announced to be included in the new test format, there are widespread beliefs amongst ADIs that, although seen to be regularly done, they are unsafe and for various reasons, believe they're potentially dangerous. It's incumbent therefore, I feel, upon ADI to discuss and coach learners / clients into understanding what is safe and unsafe about these, and why then, for example, overnight parking **with** flow of traffic is much safer.

My role is to provide my clients with the information they need to find their way around driving in the modern world, with all its imperfections. The new driving test, as I see it, gives me opportunities to say things about driving, pre / post test that I might otherwise have said or not to my clients. For example I can have a conversation about what is best practice in bay parking etc, reversing in or driving in, and if, for convenience, to do this the less safe way, why must they take extra care when manoeuvring away. Not only that, but have I overlooked helping my client to have the necessary skills to safely do this? Whereas, at the moment, I and some other ADIs may only "teach" the preferred best practice. Will my clients pull up on the right after they've passed their test to go to the shops? Yes, probably they will, so how many times have I discussed pulling up and driving away safely? Not enough really, if I'm honest, because the driving test syllabus does not encourage me to have that conversation and it's not something I'd routinely choose to cover in day-to-day lessons.

My conclusions (disabilities).

Those of you who know me well, know that I care passionately about enabling people with disabilities to drive wherever possible. For me, meeting the DVSA and challenging them on the broad range of disabling conditions, and how these may be affected by the new test, especially with the introduction of the SatNav and its potential to distract or be difficult to use, was of great concern to me. All my fears were very easily diffused during a fairly lengthy discussion on the subject, leaving me with the following conclusions and solutions to offer you.

Firstly, whether able-bodied, neuro-typical, if disabled in any way, or if your client has undiagnosed symptoms, it is your or my role as ADIs to enable that person to acquire the necessary confidence and skills, knowledge and expertise sufficient that they can operate all the machinery of their vehicle, understand and apply knowledge & experience to interact safely and robustly with the road environment and other road users. The role of the DVSA is to ensure that person is capable of independently and safely showing they can do that.

The vast majority of our clients should be able to cope with all elements and aspects of the new test given our skills and expertise, as they have done before. There are minority groups who may have difficulty and, from time to time, you may receive one such client into your student group. The difficulty may take the form of "distraction" but as ADIs, it is our responsibility to find resolutions or coping strategies. Having spent a lot of time thinking about the problems which may occur as a result of the driving test format changing, in advance of meeting DVSA I concluded that, as a professional group, we will need to do more to support one another and share knowledge, as clients with "problems" are simply not the domain of DVSA. Having said that they agreed that any candidate being presented for the driving test with a declared recognisable disability or condition (flagged on the booking) is entitled to have special recognition and treatment by DVSA.

DVSA encourage you, me, us to visit the driving test centre in advance of a test to discuss any issues about the candidate with the LDTM, and agreed it would be helpful to write a letter. If there are SatNav set-up requirements, it would be advisable to resolve these with your client and the LDTM about a week before the driving test, and the ADI should keep a note of any personalised settings needs. On the day of the driving test, the ADI should take responsibility to arrive extra-early with a copy of the written statement and settings requirements to ensure the driving examiner knows in advance about the candidate and their personal needs. ADIs are encouraged to attend any driving test of this kind so as they can act as a support to driving examiner during the driving test if any issues crop up (subject to the driving examiner requesting support).

Appendix (useful links).

<http://www.crashmap.co.uk/Search> (KSIs near you)

<http://www.roadsafetyobservatory.com> (Useful Government Resources)

<http://www.roadsafetyobservatory.com/Links> (Links from which DfT draws data)

https://www.tomtom.com/en_gb/sat-nav/car-sat-nav/products/start-52/ (Spec, buy online much cheaper!)