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1. Introduction

Young drivers continue to be a significant road safety problem. In Victoria, drivers aged between 18-24 years represent 24% of fatalities, but only 13% of licensed drivers. The Victorian Government is considering ways to reduce the crash involvement of young drivers. A range of measures, largely related to young driver licensing are likely to be considered, and it is anticipated that public feedback will be sought via the release of a Government Discussion Paper.

In order to investigate which measures would help reduce young driver crash involvement, RACV has undertaken the following research:

- A review of how various licensing measures work in overseas jurisdictions
- A review of Victorian crash statistics
- A detailed market research survey undertaken in May 2005 of novice drivers, parents of young drivers and motorists of all other ages.
- The aim of this research is to contribute to public debate and ultimately the development and implementation of effective measures to reduce the crash involvement of young Victorian drivers.

1 Obtained from material presented at the National Young Driver Forum, Canberra in December 2004.
2. Background

2.1 Young driver crash involvement

Each year in Victoria, approximately 120 road users aged between 18-25 are killed, and 2,300 are seriously injured. The cost to the community of this crash involvement is estimated to be in the order of $1 billion per annum.

Young drivers are most at risk as soon as they obtain a Probationary licence, and in the first year of driving their risk of crashing is three times higher than an experienced driver. Figure 1 illustrates the crash involvement of drivers in relation to the time since they obtained their licence.

Young drivers crash for many different reasons. Factors like inexperience, poor decision making, willingness to take risks while driving, and the influence of peer passengers and alcohol all have an impact on increasing crash risk (Harrison, 2004).

In order to address this problem, Victoria, as well as many other Australian jurisdictions is currently reviewing its licensing systems to try to enhance the pre-licence experience of young drivers and also consider whether exposure to high risk driving situations can be restricted to reduce the current level of trauma. Last year the Victorian Minister for Transport publicly announced that the Government will release a Discussion Paper about Young Driver Licensing. To date, this Discussion Paper has not been released.

2.2. Licensing systems used in Victoria and other jurisdictions

The components of the current Victorian licensing system are outlined below.
The NSW Government released a public Discussion Paper in November 2004 titled “Improving safety for young drivers: An options paper for community comment”. This Discussion Paper outlined several potential ways of improving the licensing system in NSW to reduce young driver crash involvement.

It should be noted that the young driver licensing system in New South Wales is already slightly different than the Victorian system. In NSW the provisional period is split in two, with the first phase called the P1 (or green P) which can be obtained at 17 years and the second phase is called the P2 (or red P). Drivers need to pass a computer based test to graduate from P1 to P2. Some of the proposals outlined in the NSW Discussion Paper include:

- Increasing the amount of driving experience that learners must obtain before sitting for a provisional licence from 50 hours to 100 hours
- Increasing the minimum time a person must hold a Learner permit from 6 months to 12 months (for drivers under the age of 26)
- Requiring provisional drivers in the first phase of solo driving (those on the P1 licence) to drive with no more than one passenger (for drivers under the age of 26) with exemptions applying for work and study reasons
- Requiring provisional drivers in the first phase of solo driving (those on the P1 licence) to avoid driving between the hours of 10pm-5am (for drivers under the age of 26) with exemptions applying for work and study reasons.

The NSW Minister for Transport is expected to announce the Government’s response to this Discussion Paper some time in June 2005.

Many overseas countries have introduced changes to their licensing systems over the last 5 to 10 years. In what is loosely called Graduated Licensing Systems (GLS), various overseas jurisdictions have made changes to Learner periods, and have restrictions for newly licensed drivers. These GLS models are used in over 40 states within the USA, as well as in Canada, New Zealand and in a few European countries. Some evaluations of these systems have been undertaken and have generally
found positive results. It should be noted that most of the overseas jurisdictions with GLS models particularly those in the US, have licensing ages of 15-16 years, which is different from Victoria, which has a licensing age of 18 years. Sweden also has introduced some forms of GLS and they have a licence age of 18 years.

### 2.3 Initiatives being considered

A range of initiatives could be considered to improve the safety of young drivers. Some of the initiatives that could be introduced in Victoria are already implemented in overseas countries. What commonly occurs in other jurisdictions is that the Probationary period is split in two, and there is a first phase with more restrictions, (called P1) and a second phase with less restrictions (called P2). The diagram below illustrates how a more graduated licensing system in Victoria could look, with potential changes to the current licensing system shown in bold.

**Figure 3** Some potential changes to the young driver licensing system in Victoria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learner period</th>
<th>Probationary period – P1</th>
<th>Probationary period – P2</th>
<th>Full licence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eligibility</strong></td>
<td>• Must be 16 yrs</td>
<td>• Must be 18 yrs</td>
<td>• Must have held P2 licence for 2 yrs &amp; 6mths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pass a knowledge test and vision test</td>
<td>• Pass a revised on-road test and hazard perception test</td>
<td>• Must have a clean driving record in P2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conditions</strong></td>
<td>• Must be supervised by a fully licensed driver</td>
<td>• Must have zero BAC</td>
<td>• Zero BAC until the age of 23 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Must have zero BAC</td>
<td>• Must have zero BAC</td>
<td>• Must not use a mobile phone – hands free or hand held mobile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Must hold permit for min. of 12 mths if under 25 yrs</td>
<td>• Must have completed P1 phase</td>
<td>• Vehicle power restrictions apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Must have completed 100-120 hours of supervised experience</td>
<td>• Must have a clean driving record in P1</td>
<td>• Lower demerit point threshold – 5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Multiple passenger restrictions</td>
<td>• Must not use a mobile phone – hands free or hand held mobile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Must not use a mobile phone – hands free or hand held mobile</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Method for analysing potential measures

Each of the measures that might be considered in Victoria are likely to create considerable public debate. In order to contribute to this debate, RACV has reviewed each of the potential measures based on the following factors:

- **Magnitude of the problem** in terms of current Victorian crash rates;
- **Effectiveness** the evidence that the initiatives would be effective in reducing road trauma;
- **Acceptance** how acceptable the initiatives will be to the community
- **Social consequences** the impact such measures would have on the mobility of young Victorians, and their ability to work, study and meet other obligations.

In order to analyse the potential changes to the licensing system, the following evidence was gathered:

- Crash rates for young Victorian road users were obtained to help define the magnitude of the road safety problem in Victoria.
- Evidence about the effectiveness of various measures was obtained via several literature reviews, including summaries prepared by Harrison (2004) and Senserrick and Whelan (2003).
- The level of acceptance was ascertained via a Young Driver Licensing Survey that RACV commissioned, which involved both qualitative and quantitative components. This research was conducted by Kerryn Alexander Research and included focus groups with Learners, Probationary drivers, parents of young drivers and general motorists. This was followed by a telephone survey of 607 Victorians to ascertain their views. The total sample comprised three subgroups: novice drivers (n=150) including current Learner drivers, Probationary drivers and a small number of pre-learners; parents of novice drivers (n=139); and general motorists (n=318) comprising Victorian motorists aged 21 and over, who were full licence holders and who were not parents of novice drivers.
- While it is difficult to estimate the impact on mobility of some of the proposed restrictions, research from an earlier RACV study with young drivers on fatigue was utilised to provide an estimate of how many trips current Probationary drivers take at night and with multiple passengers. This survey involved 163 drivers aged between 18 and 20 years who provided diary information about all of the driving they did (Harrison, 2005).
4. Discussion of young driver licensing measures in Victoria

4.1 Learner permit changes

A range of measures could be considered to help improve the safety of young drivers in Victoria. Some measures relate to improving the Learner driver period, to ensure that young drivers have extensive supervised driving experience in a range of conditions before they sit for the Probationary licence.

Extending the Learner permit period to a minimum of 12 months could be considered. The current minimum is 6 months. The road safety rationale for this is that Learners, who hold a Learner permit for a shorter period, may have less supervised driving experience and have a higher crash risk than those who gain more pre-licence experience. Evidence from overseas jurisdictions supports increasing the minimum time on a Learner permit, as long as this time is used to get supervised driving experience.

Swedish research found that Learners who undertook 110 hours of supervised driving experience had 40% less crashes than those who had only 47 hours of experience (Harrison, 2004). In Victoria, the average number of hours of supervised driving experience Learners undertake is approximately 80-90 hours, which has increased over the last few years with the introduction of campaigns to encourage Learners to undertake 120 hours before being licensed. Some consideration could be given to making it compulsory for all Learners to receive 100 or 120 hours of supervised experience before sitting for their P test. Other jurisdictions have such requirements, for instance Learners in NSW need to have a minimum of 50 hours before sitting for the P test and some consideration is being given to increasing this to a minimum of 100 hours.

The qualitative component of the RACV Young Driver Licensing Survey found that most people were happy to see the Learner period extended to a minimum of 12 months.

Many respondents also supported the introduction of a compulsory number of driving hours that would need to be accrued before sitting for the Probationary licence test. Eighty-seven per cent of respondents supported making some number of pre-licence driving hours compulsory. Most respondents thought that a relatively high number of hours should be made compulsory, with 74% of respondents agreeing to a limit of at least 80 hours of experience, and 60% supporting at least 100 hours.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of hours of compulsory experience</th>
<th>Total (N=607)</th>
<th>General Motorists (n=318)</th>
<th>Novices (n=150)</th>
<th>Parents of novices (n=139)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>120+</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-120</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-100</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-80</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 60</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should not be compulsory</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In terms of mobility, a minimum Learner period of 12 months would be more likely to affect older people getting licensed rather than younger ones, who have the option of obtaining their Learner Permit at 16 years. Introducing a requirement that all Learners undertake 100 or 120 hours of supervised experience prior to licensing would be likely to reduce road trauma, but this would disadvantage young people who did not have ready access to a car or supervising drivers.

Conclusion

The benefits of Learners undertaking extensive amounts of supervised driving experience are clearly documented. As this measure has a high level of community support, making it compulsory that all Learners obtain 100 or more hours of supervised experience before sitting for the Probationary licence test should be considered. However, the Government would need to implement more extensive programs to help disadvantaged young people.

Extending the minimum learner period from 6 months to 12 months would also allow more time for young people to gain driving experience and as this measure is generally well supported by the community, it should also be considered by Government.

4.2 Changes to P test

To obtain a Probationary licence in Victoria at present, Learners need to pass an on-road test and a hazard perception test. There has been some suggestion that changes need to be made to the on-road test which has not undergone a significant review since 1990. The nature of the Probationary test can often dictate the nature of the preparation that Learners undertake prior to the test.

While there is little research available that demonstrates what an optimum Probationary test should be, reviewing the on-road test is timely and raising the driving requirements of the test may have some positive road safety outcomes.

Half of the respondents (50%) in the Young Driver Licensing Survey thought that the current licence test was “about right” in terms of difficulty, although almost 30% of respondents thought the test was “too easy” and should be made more difficult. Improving the on-road test and making the testing more thorough and consistent, were common responses mentioned during the focus groups with young people and their parents.

If changes to the on-road component of the Probationary test made it more difficult, this may result in delayed licensing among some individuals. This would generally have a positive road safety effect. However this would need to be balanced with the need to ensure that the test is not perceived as too difficult, which could lead to an increase in unlicensed driving.

Conclusion

While there is very little information about what makes an effective on-road Probationary licence test, the current Victorian test needs to be reviewed and the Government should commit to undertaking this.

4.3 Night restrictions

Many overseas jurisdictions impose late night driving restrictions on newly licensed drivers. This means that they are not permitted to drive at night (usually between the hours of 10pm and 6am) unless they are supervised by a fully licensed driver. Jurisdictions that impose this restriction allow exemptions for young people who have work, study or other essential commitments.

Victorian crash statistics show that 33% of all fatal crashes involving P plate drivers occur at night (between the hours of 10pm-6am). Involvement in night-time crashes is highest in the first 6 months of probationary driving and declines throughout the remaining probationary period. The risk of a new Probationary driver being involved in a fatal crash between 10pm-5am is 6 times higher than for all other drivers (NSW RTA, 2004).
Evaluations of Graduated Licensing Systems in the US have found that night-time restrictions are the most effective component of young driver licensing systems, and this restriction has been linked to reductions in crash numbers during night-time (Harrison, 2004).

Most jurisdictions apply the night-time restriction to the first 6 months of the probationary period. For instance, this might mean that in Victoria, such a restriction would only be placed on Probationary drivers (probably those aged under 21 or under 25 and not older Probationary drivers) and would last 6 months.

Late-night driving restrictions were the least popular of all measures tested in the Young Driver Licensing Survey. Respondents were asked whether they would support the introduction of a restriction on driving between 10pm-6am for Probationary drivers during the first 6 months of their licence. Overall, 40% of respondents supported the measure. The research findings are shown in figure 4.

There seemed to be a lack of understanding about the dangers of driving at night among respondents. The main reasons for not supporting this measure was a concern that it would be inconvenient, especially for young people, that it was unfair and also that it would be impractical to implement. During the qualitative component of the RACV survey, most novice drivers disliked this option, as they felt it would impact very significantly on many of their social trips.

One area of concern that a night-time restriction raises is the impact it would have on the mobility of young people. In reviewing the research RACV undertook about the driving patterns of young people, the findings showed that a night-time restriction between 10pm and 6am with exemptions for work related and education related travel, would affect about 6.8% of young novice driver trips (Harrison, 2005).

Conclusion

Despite the evidence that night driving restrictions would be likely to be effective and that night-time driving is risky for newly licensed drivers, restricting Probationary drivers from driving at night did not have strong community support. The Government should consider undertaking further public education about the increased risks to Probationary drivers of late-night driving before considering the introduction of such a measure in Victoria.

4.4 Passenger restrictions

Another potential measure to reduce the exposure to high-risk situations during the first few months of solo driving involves passenger restrictions. This restriction is commonly used in overseas Graduated Licensing Systems.

Victorian crash statistics show that 26% of fatal crashes involving Probationary drivers occur when the young driver is carrying multiple passengers. The risk of crash involvement increases with the number of passengers, and new P plate drivers have four times the risk of being in a fatal crash if they are carrying more than one passenger.

Research from overseas jurisdictions has found that passenger restrictions can be effective as they free the young driver from additional in-car distractions and peer influences, until they are more
experienced. On the whole, passenger restrictions, if there is a high level of compliance, are found to result in fewer young road user fatalities (Harrison, 2004).

Passenger restrictions are not always an easy restriction to impose, but it is generally a restriction on carrying more than one passenger. A simple way of communicating this is that Probationary drivers are not permitted to carry more than one passenger (only two people in the car) in the first 6 months of driving unless they are accompanied by a supervising driver. Exemptions to this restriction, for work, study or for family reasons would be available.

The possibility of this type of passenger restriction was put to respondents in the Young Driver Licensing Survey. This measure had relatively strong support from general motorists and from the parents of novice drivers. The level of support was considerably lower among novice drivers, although 42% of them did support this measure. Findings are shown in figure 5.

To assess the likely impact this type of measure would have on mobility, data from the research RACV undertook about the driving patterns of young people was examined. This research showed that a restriction on carrying multiple passengers would affect about 4.4% of young novice driver trips (Harrison, 2005).

The impact that such a restriction would have on designated drivers providing trips for others who are over the legal drink driving limit was raised by 12% of respondents. This was discussed further in the qualitative component of the RACV Young Driver Licensing Survey. While some general motorists were concerned about the impact passenger restrictions would have on designated driving, most Learner and Probationary drivers did not agree. Many commented on how distracting and stressful it is to drive drunken friends home, and they generally regarded being a designated driver, especially when inexperienced, as being quite dangerous.

Conclusion

The community on the whole seems to understand that P plate drivers who are driving with multiple passengers are likely to be distracted and influenced by their passengers and that this can be dangerous. As such, the community generally supports restricting newly licensed P platers to carry only one other passenger, unless supervised. This, together with the evidence about the increased crash risk associated with carrying multiple passengers, warrant passenger restrictions being considered as a component of the licensing system, during the early Probationary period.

4.5 Mobile Phones

Two jurisdictions in the United States, New Jersey and Maine, have recently introduced laws to prohibit Probationary drivers from using mobile phones in any form.

Research by Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC) suggests that young drivers are more likely to drive while using a mobile phone, and that inexperienced drivers may be more likely to be distracted while talking on a hands-free phone (Senserrick and Whelan, 2003). However, there is no research available that provides evidence that Probationary drivers are more at risk of being involved in crashes if they are talking on a hands-free phone compared with more experienced drivers.
As only two States in the US have introduced this condition on Probationary drivers, no evaluation studies have been undertaken to evaluate its effect on crash outcomes.

Public reaction to the suggestion that all Probationary drivers should be prohibited from using any form of mobile phone while driving received quite strong support from respondents. The findings of the Young Driver Licensing Survey are shown in figure 6.

Unlike some of the other restrictions, this measure would not impair the mobility of young people however, it may have some implications for young people who would be expected to use a hands-free phone while driving as part of their employment.

**Conclusion**

While a ban on mobile phones for Probationary drivers received good support from the community, more research about the level of risk associated with using a hands-free phone while driving among both the general population and Probationary drivers is needed, before this measure could be considered. More enforcement of the current mobile phone laws to prevent driving while using a hand-held phone is also needed.

### 4.6 Graduation from Probationary phase

The current licensing system in Victoria does not require a Probationary driver to pass any form of hurdle to graduate from being a Probationary driver to a fully licensed driver. While some other Australian jurisdictions have introduced exit tests, there is little evidence that these measures are effective in reducing road trauma, although detailed evaluations have not yet been undertaken.

There is some evidence from research that young drivers with a high number of offences have a higher crash risk (Senserrick and Whelan, 2003). Subsequently, there is an argument for requiring Probationary drivers to have a clean, or relatively clean driving record before they can graduate to the next stage of the licensing system.

This concept was canvassed during the qualitative phase of the Young Driver Licensing Survey, and received in principle support from novice drivers, their parents and general motorists. However, how a “good” driving record was defined caused considerable debate, and the use of demerit points were regarded sceptically. Several respondents noted that P plate drivers already have a lower demerit point threshold than other drivers and questioned how this would work.

In terms of mobility consequences, this measure would not have a large impact on most young drivers, but would aim to limit the exposure of young drivers who have a history of offences (and are a group that may be more risky drivers) from driving at high risk times.

**Conclusion**

The idea of requiring Probationary drivers to have a good driving record before they graduate from their Ps received in principle support from the community. While such a measure may need to have the details carefully considered, the premise of needing to show a good driving record as a Probationary driver before graduating has merit and should be considered by Government.
4.7 Zero Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) restriction extension

All Probationary drivers in Victoria are required to have a zero blood alcohol concentration (BAC) as a condition of their licence. Most young people then progress to a full licence without an alcohol restriction when they are 21 years old.

Victorian crash data shows that among 18-20 year olds, 25% of all drivers killed had a BAC over 0.05, yet this proportion increases considerably after young people turn 21, with 40-50% of all 21-25 year old drivers killed in Victoria being over the legal alcohol limit. Consequently, young drivers who are no longer required to have a zero BAC seem to represent a large drink driving problem.

One suggested way of countering this problem is to either increase the zero BAC condition beyond the P period until all drivers are 23 or 24 years of age. Another option is to increase the length of Probationary period by one or two years.

No international or interstate comparisons are available, as no other jurisdiction has introduced such measures, and Victoria has the longest probationary period of all of the Australian jurisdictions.

Most respondents (82%) in the RACV Young Driver Licensing Survey regarded the current length of the probationary period to be “about right”. However, extending the zero BAC restriction beyond the probationary period to the age of 23 was generally well supported, even among novice drivers. The results are shown in figure 7.

Conclusion

The level of drink driving and alcohol related crashes seem to increase after a young person graduates to a full licence and are not required to adhere to a zero blood alcohol level. The idea that all young drivers under the age of 23 be required to have a zero blood alcohol level even if they are not on their Probationary licence, was regarded as a good idea by most respondents. Given this level of community support, this measure should be considered by Government.
The main findings from the research review and RACV surveys are outlined in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Measure</th>
<th>Magnitude</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Acceptance</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Learner period</td>
<td>Learners now get approx. 80 hrs driving experience</td>
<td>More experience would reduce crashes</td>
<td>High levels of support (87%) for compulsory no. of hours – 100-120+ most popular. Support for 12mth min. Learner period</td>
<td>Small-moderate – may delay licensing among older people getting licences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing P test</td>
<td>15 years since test reviewed</td>
<td>No optimum test known</td>
<td>High level of support for improving the on-road test</td>
<td>Small – may delay licensing if test is more difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night restrictions</td>
<td>33% of P crashes occur at night</td>
<td>Most effective measure in overseas evaluations</td>
<td>Low support (40%) from community</td>
<td>Some impact – about 6.8% of young driver trips affected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passenger restrictions</td>
<td>26% of P crashes involve multiple passengers</td>
<td>Effective in reducing crashes assuming compliance</td>
<td>Moderate – high support (66%) from community</td>
<td>Some impact – about 4.4% of young driver trips affected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation from P’s</td>
<td>Currently, no requirements before graduating to full licence</td>
<td>Link between offences and crash risk and some evidence for good record before graduating</td>
<td>In principle support, but concern over defining a good or bad driving record</td>
<td>Small – only impact is on those with poor driving records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile phone restriction</td>
<td>Young drivers are higher users of mobiles</td>
<td>No evaluations undertaken to date</td>
<td>Moderate - high support (66%) from community</td>
<td>Minor mobility implications, work implications for small number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing zero BAC</td>
<td>40-50% of 21-25 yr old driver who are killed are over legal BAC limit</td>
<td>Not implemented in any other jurisdiction</td>
<td>Moderate – high support (67%) for increasing zero BAC to 23 years</td>
<td>Few mobility implications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Summary of findings
Given the over-involvement of probationary drivers in crashes, it is clear that some additional measures need to be introduced to reduce this level of trauma. The aim of this report was to review the available research about young driver licensing measures and to test the acceptance of some potential measures with the Victorian community.

The main findings of this research are outlined below.

- Based on the clear benefits of Learners undertaking extensive amounts of supervised driving experience, as well as the high levels of support this measure has in the community, making it compulsory that all Learners obtain 100-120 hours of supervised experience before sitting for the Probationary licence test should be considered. As the average Learner in Victoria currently receives 80-90 hours of driving experience, this level would not be too high. However, the Government would need to implement more extensive programs to help disadvantaged young people who may not have access to supervisors or a vehicle to ensure that this requirement would not disadvantage them.

- Extending the minimum period young people need to hold a Learner permit for from 6 months to 12 months would similarly allow more time for young people to gain experience. This measure is generally well supported by the community.

- While there is very little information about what makes an effective on-road Probationary licence test, the fact that the current Victorian test has not been reviewed for 15 years is cause for concern. A review of this licence test is warranted, and should be considered by the Government.

- The very high level of crash involvement of newly licensed Probationary drivers needs to be addressed. The two factors that contribute to crash involvement among this age group is driving with multiple passengers and driving at night. While restricting newly licensed drivers from driving unsupervised at night and with multiple passengers has been shown to be effective in other countries, the level of public acceptance in Victoria is an important consideration.

- The community on the whole seems to understand that P plate drivers who are driving with multiple passengers are likely to be distracted and influenced by their passengers and that this can be dangerous. As such, two-thirds of respondents in RACV’s survey would support restricting newly licensed P platers to carry only one other passenger, unless supervised. If such a measure were implemented, it would be important that the restriction only last for the first 6 months of the P period and that exemptions for work, study and family reasons be available. This restriction should only apply to younger Probationary drivers, such as those under 21, and not older Probationary drivers who are not involved in as many crashes as younger Probationary drivers.

- While one-third of all crashes that newly licensed P plate drivers are involved in occur at night, restricting Probationary drivers from driving at night did not have strong community support. The Government should consider undertaking further public education about the increased risks to Probationary drivers of late night driving.

- The idea of requiring Probationary drivers to have a good driving record before they come off their P’s received in principle support from the community. However, how this would apply in practice caused some debate. If the Probationary period were split into two, it might be possible to require a clean driving record (that is, no demerit points) in order to graduate from the first
phase to the second phase. It might also be possible to require that Probationary drivers need to have had no history of licence suspension before they graduate to a full licence. While these measures may need to have the details carefully considered, the premise of needing to show a good driving record as a Probationary driver before graduating has merit.

- Some research reports have recommended that Probationary drivers should not be permitted to drive while using either a hand-held or hands-free phone. While such a restriction did receive good support from the community, more research about the level of risk associated with using a hands-free phone while driving among both the general population and Probationary drivers is needed. Similarly, given the relatively low level of compliance with the existing laws about using hand-held phones, safety gains could potentially be made from greater levels of enforcement. Technology advances could potentially assist in this enforcement effort.

- The level of drink driving and alcohol related crashes seem to increase after a young person graduates to a full licence and are not required to adhere to a zero blood alcohol concentration. The idea that all young drivers under the age of 23 should be required to have a zero blood alcohol level even if they are not on their Probationary licence, was regarded as a good idea by 67% of respondents in RACV’s survey. This included reasonable levels of support (62%) among current Learner and Probationary drivers. Given this level of community support, this measure should be considered by Government.

**Recommendation**

RACV has undertaken this research as a contribution to public debate on the important issue of young driver safety. RACV commends the results of this research to the State Government for consideration in its proposed review of Victoria’s Young Driver Licensing System. It urges the Government to release its foreshadowed Discussion Paper without delay.
7. References


