



Driver & Vehicle  
Standards  
Agency

# Improving the car driving test

Response to consultation

Helping you stay safe  
on Britain's roads

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## Executive summary

This paper reports the outcome of the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency's (DVSA) consultation about changes to the car driving test.

The consultation was held between 14 July and 25 August 2016.

The consultation paper contained proposals for 4 changes to the way the driving test is conducted. These are:

- increase the independent driving section of the practical driving test from 10 to 20 minutes
- provide the option for the directions in the independent driving section to be followed by using a sat nav, in addition to the current practice of following road signs
- modify the way in which manoeuvres are delivered, so that they are undertaken during the natural course of the drive - the exercises undertaken would be updated for modern driving conditions
- ask one of the 2 vehicle safety questions while on the move instead of at the start of the test

There was broad support for the proposals. We've received the final presentation with the findings from a trial of the new test undertaken by the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL). This identifies improvements delivered by the new test.

Taking into account the outcome of the consultation and the TRL research, the new test will be introduced for learner car drivers from 4 December 2017.

**88.2%**

agreed with increasing the length of the independent driving part of the test

**70.8%**

agreed with asking candidates to follow directions from a sat nav

**78.6%**

agreed with the plans to change the reversing manoeuvres that are tested

**78.4%**

agreed with asking the 'show me' question while the candidate is driving

## Introduction

On 14 July 2016, DVSA published a consultation paper - 'Improving the car driving test'. The consultation was conducted online and was available on GOV.UK. The closing date for responding was 25 August 2016.

The proposals in the paper were developed in conjunction with key external stakeholders and are included in the DVSA strategy and the British Road Safety Statement. They were recommended by an advisory group of road safety professionals, including driving instructor associations, behaviourist academics, special needs representatives and others.

The main aim of the proposals is road safety; to reduce the numbers killed and seriously injured each year. The practical driving test is an essential element in ensuring drivers have achieved the required level of competence before being allowed to drive unsupervised.

The independent driving element was introduced into the test in 2010. Subsequent research indicated a positive response from candidates and a range of further changes were trialled, including more relevant manoeuvres, new ways to deliver the 'show me, tell me' requirements and the use of sat nav.

These changes are incorporated into the newly-designed test, with the aim of making the test experience closer to real-life driving that these changes will result in an improved attitude to the learning to drive process and will encourage learners and newly qualified drivers to take responsibility. In addition, the new test aims to open up test routes and better assess candidates in more natural or higher risk situations, including driving on national speed limit roads and dual carriageways or in dealing with distractions.



Since April 2015, TRL has been undertaking a research evaluation into the new test. It has monitored 2 groups of volunteers, one taking the new test, the other the current test.

The findings, which were presented to DVSA in February 2017, support the benefits. Drivers who take the new test have a little more insight into their limitations as drivers and, potentially as a result, have more confidence that they will go on to be a safe driver (an attitude which previous work has shown has a beneficial effect over the early years of driving).

The findings also identified that those learning with an instructor on rural roads, or independently, if they did 8 hours or more driving, would see a 40% reduction in collisions compared with those who did none.

The data in the current study suggest that the new test will be a welcome addition to the licensing process, being more representative of post-test driving, and potentially being a platform from which greater and more varied pre-test practice can more easily be promoted in the future.



## Responses to the consultation

DVSA received 3,953 responses to the consultation. Those responding included from approved driving instructors (ADIs), learner and recently qualified drivers, accompanying drivers (such as a parent, relative or friend). Also responding were other drivers, many highly experienced, vulnerable road users (such as cyclists, motorcyclists and horse riders) and other road safety and ADI representative organisations.

Of the large stakeholder organisations, the National Associations Strategic Partnership (NASP), provided a combined response on behalf of the:

- Motor Schools Association
- ADI National Joint Council
- Driving Instructors Association
- Driving Instructors Scottish Council

Each of these organisations also responded individually.

Other larger road safety and driver trainer organisations who responded included:

- IAM RoadSmart (previously IAM – the Institute of Advanced Motorists)
- the RAC
- AA The Driving School/the British School of Motoring
- the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport
- the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

Other larger groups responding included:

- Transport for London
- BRAKE
- South Yorkshire Safer Roads Partnership
- the British Parking Association
- Bikeability Schemes (a joint response representing British Cycling, Cycling Scotland, Cycling UK, and the London Cycling Campaign)
- the Driving Instructors Democratic Union
- UNITE
- the Public and Commercial Services Union

## Summary of views

The proposals to make improvements to the practical driving test received support from the majority of those responding to the consultation.

While points were raised with regard to individual elements of the proposals, the overall view was that the amended test would serve as a focus for good preparation in advance of a career of driving independently.

The changes would sharpen assessment methods and adapt the test to meet the challenges of modern road and traffic conditions, taking into account current driving practices and, in so doing, improve the road safety benefits of the testing and training experience.

A variety of views were expressed about the proposals.



# Breakdown of responses

## Overall

The breakdown of those responding, by capacity in which they responded, was as follows.

Approved or prospective driving Instructor	1,551
Driver	1,025
Accompanying driver	449
Learner driver	228
Vulnerable road user (horse rider or cyclist)	218
Recently qualified driver (within last 6 months)	111
Lorry, bus or coach driver	63
Member of public	52
Driving examiner	41
Road safety professional/organisation	32
Other driver trainer	28
Road traffic professional	21
Relative of learner or newly qualified driver	20
Road transport organisation	20
Motorcycle trainer	18
Emergency services	12
Motorcyclist	12
Lorry or bus trainer	11
Police	8
Driving instructor representative association	6
Fleet driving	6
Insurance	5
Health and safety	4
Education sector	3
Motor industry	3
Motoring organisation	3
Trade Union	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,953</b>



## Those who took part in the trial

The following number of responses were received from those who have taken part in the trial of the new test, undertaken by TRL.

ADI	95
Learner driver	20
Accompanying driver	14

## Increase in the length of the independent driving exercise

The total number of online responses, indicating a preference, were as follows.

Totally agree	1,943	49.4%
Largely agree	1,033	26.3%
Slightly agree	492	12.5%
Slightly disagree	120	3.1%
Largely disagree	137	3.5%
Totally disagree	208	5.3%

The proposal to increase the independent driving section of the test from 10 to 20 minutes received support from the majority of those who responded.

There were 1,242 comments on this proposal with the overall view being that this is a realistic exercise that helps in planning a route and is good practice for driving independently after the candidate has passed the test.

**88.2%**

**agreed with increasing the length of the independent driving part of the test**

It was considered that this was an effective method of assessment of a candidate’s ability and increasing this part of the test would provide greater opportunity for the examiner to establish the individual’s competence in driving unaccompanied.

The wider scope of the new test would provide the candidate with the opportunity to demonstrate driving skills in a larger variety of scenarios, including more opportunities to interact with vulnerable road users, such as cyclists and horse riders.

Some of those responding felt that candidates should have to continue to read road signs and the whole 20 minutes should not be taken up in its entirety by using a sat nav.

The comments from many ADIs confirmed the view that the independent drive was good preparation for driving unsupervised once qualified. It reflected realistic driving and assisted with forward planning, with the proposed longer time period being suitable to enable a fuller assessment of a pupil's ability to safely and successfully navigate a journey.

There were comments supporting both the view that, if increased, this element of the test could be an overly long proportion and, conversely, that this element should be longer. Some referred to the potential for increased pressure on candidates and observed that the driving test is already a stressful event.

The representative and road safety organisations broadly supported the change, which would:

- involve a more pragmatic assessment of a candidate's ability to manage the key risks associated with driving
- help learner drivers to drive unaccompanied and be better prepared to deal with everyday, 'real life' situations after the test, when they were at most risk because of lack of experience.

They considered that the proposals should generate routes taking candidates further from test centres and include a wider variety of rural roads - a vulnerable area early in driving careers – and faster, more varied and higher-risk routes over longer distances.

## Inclusion of sat nav in the independent driving section of the test

The total number of online responses, indicating a preference, were as follows.

Totally agree	1,140	29.1%
Largely agree	906	23.1%
Slightly agree	730	18.6%
Slightly disagree	231	5.9%
Largely disagree	308	7.9%
Totally disagree	605	15.4%

# 70.8%

**agreed with asking candidates to follow directions from a sat nav**

There were 1,630 comments on this proposal. Many responses considered that sat navs are a widely-used modern driving aid on which candidates should have experience, so it's important that drivers are trained in their use.

Some felt that sat navs could be a distraction on test from the need to concentrate on the road, while others recognised that they could indeed be a distraction but a positive one - as their inclusion would encourage training to be able to deal with that distraction after passing the test.

Various respondents took the view that drivers should still be able to navigate using maps and road signs and that sat navs were simply a driving aid. A number commented that not everyone used, or could afford to use, a sat nav.

Some of those responding did not see a significant difference between instructions being given by a driving examiner or a sat nav. Others queried who would supply the sat navs and a small number suggested that they should be available for use on test in Welsh.

There were also comments on the cost and power-charging arrangements for the devices to be supplied to examiners and the importance of the correct location for them to be placed during the test was also mentioned. Some questioned the cost and reliability of sat navs, with a number of respondents recognising that there is a difference between the type of instruction given depending which sat nav is used.

The representative organisations were supportive of including the use of sat nav on test which would make newly qualified drivers – who were most likely to use one - more capable of benefiting from the increasing use of in car technology.

This would address concerns over driver distraction, adding a greater challenge and level of complexity to the test, enhancing the 'real life' feel of the test.

It would also support a longer independent drive, increasing the number of available routes and avoiding the need to rely on road signs and enabling testing in unfamiliar areas.

Learner drivers who had taken part in the trial had advised that it made the test more realistic, allowed the test routes to go out further and avoided the numerous move offs in the current test.

Training would be encouraged by inclusion in the test. This included items such as route planning, the dangers of illegally changing the programming while driving and the importance of not following directions where they were inappropriate.

Questions were raised about where the device would be positioned during the test.

## How often drivers renew their sat navs

This question was included to provide information which could be taken into account when deciding on the expected life of a sat nav for test. 3,950 of those who completed the online questionnaire responded as follows.

Less than a year	86	2.2%
Between one and 2 years	335	8.6%
Between 2 and 3 years	481	12.3%
Between 3 and 4 years	419	10.7%
Over 4 years	601	15.3%
Not at all	864	22.1%
I don't use a sat nav	1,132	28.9%

This information will be helpful in informing decisions to be taken on the procurement of sat navs.



## Modify the delivery of manoeuvres

Totally agree	1,501	38.2%
Largely agree	1,012	25.8%
Slightly agree	573	14.6%
Slightly disagree	211	5.4%
Largely disagree	243	6.2%
Totally disagree	385	9.8%

**78.6%**

**agreed with the plans to change the reversing manoeuvres that are tested**

There were 1,663 comments on this proposal. The modified manoeuvres were generally supported, although some respondents questioned the changes to the traditional formats.

Various respondents were in favour of retaining the delivery of the manoeuvres through a traditional format of turn-in-the-road, which they saw as an exercise that would be carried out in regular driving after they had passed the test, and, to a lesser extent, the reverse around corner (although the latter was seen increasingly as outdated).

Some felt that, rather than modify the format of the manoeuvres, we should add the new ones to the range that could be demonstrated during the test.

Other suggestions included measures to test and educate candidates on vulnerable road users such as horses, cyclists and pedestrians.

Some respondents expressed concern about the pulling-up-on-the-right and reversing-out-of-a-parking-bay manoeuvres. Compliance with The Highway Code advice and best practice were raised and there were concerns about safety implications.

The practicality of using public car parks at supermarkets on a regular basis was also questioned, as these are private property.

Almost all the representative organisations were in favour of the proposals, which they felt represented real life scenarios, and which should help drivers acquire skills necessary to control the vehicle in modern driving situations.

They were preferable to artificially delivered manoeuvres, would offer the opportunity to spend more time on quiet and high speed roads and would free up time for the extended independent drive.

One ADI association, however, reported concern from members about the pulling-up-on-the-right exercise. They also questioned the desirability of the forward bay park and undertaking this exercise in a car park rather than as the turn-in-the-road.

Overall, however, the associations welcomed the modified manoeuvres. It was imperative that the new test assessed a candidate's ability to manage the risks of real life driving and learner drivers should be fully prepared, when coming to test, to manage such manoeuvres, particularly as they were also core competences in the national standard for cars and light vans.

## Change in format of vehicle safety questions

The total number of online responses, indicating a preference, were as follows.

Totally agree	1,543	39.4%
Largely agree	1,006	25.7%
Slightly agree	522	13.3%
Slightly disagree	266	6.8%
Largely disagree	226	5.8%
Totally disagree	358	9.1%

# 78.4%

**agreed with asking the 'show me' question while the candidate is driving**

There were 1,342 comments on this proposal. The overall flavour was that it would add to the realism of the test, with the activities to be demonstrated – which required drivers to multitask - typical of the type of action needed in normal driving. This was provided that the questions were asked at a stage in the test where it was safe to operate the vehicle's controls and were relevant to the road and traffic conditions pertaining at the time.

Some respondents expressed concerns about distractions for candidates, which some felt could add to the pressure of taking a driving test. Others felt that, as with the sat nav, this exercise would help candidates learn how to deal with distractions that were inherent elements in driving. This would result in them being able to drive safely while operating the various controls after they had passed the test.

Several respondents felt that, because of differences in layout between vehicles, there would be a lack of familiarity for candidates who took the test in a car they had rarely driven previously, which could arise if their regular one was unavailable. There could also be special needs issues especially for those with hearing difficulties. There may also be language issues for non-English speakers.

Various suggestions were made, for example, including questions about vulnerable road users, the ancillary functions to be tested or the candidate giving a commentary while driving.

Representative organisations supported this as a sensible proposal with some saying that new drivers would be more aware of real life situations where all drivers must, from time to time, operate auxiliary controls. The new arrangement would test a candidate's ability to do the task in a more naturalistic setting while driving. It would make the best use of time, with the time saved being used for other tasks. The proposal would cover the candidate's approach and reaction to distraction during the test.

## General comments

We also asked for general views on the consultation, with 2,384 being received. These covered a wide range of areas, including supporting the views expressed in relation to the 4 main proposals.

Comments included the view that this was important preparation for driving, especially in the vulnerable first year and that technical advances to vehicles had enhanced power and speed and increased distraction to drivers which made the review welcome.

Vulnerable road users were mentioned and interaction with this group could be achieved via the increase in independent driving. It was hoped that ADIs would be encouraged to motivate new drivers to continue the learning process after they were qualified to drive.

Other suggestions included the importance of reducing waiting times, the main influence of driver attitude, wider post-test driver education and interaction with and attitude towards other road users.

Some raised issues that were outside the scope of this consultation including a minimum learning period, allowing learner drivers on motorways, instructors signing off manoeuvres and logbooks and other post-test measures such as the use of P plates.

The main representative organisations welcomed the changes, which would result in an evolved and pragmatic driving test. The suggested improvements were welcomed, with the key to safer driving being better preparation. Refocusing the driving test, so that it concentrated on the skills required and used in every day driving, would allow instructors to better prepare learner drivers for a safer driving career.

This would evolve the test towards a pragmatic assessment of a candidate's ability to manage risks associated with driving and to drive independently after the test.

In spite of concerns from some about the pulling-up-on-the-right manoeuvre, the overall view was that it was more important to assess ability to manage risks of real driving after the test. It was hoped that the proposals were not an isolated attempt to improve quality and ability of novice drivers but part of a wider series of measures to evolve driver training.

The full research results were awaited and beneficial but modest impacts on safety anticipated.



The main representative bodies also recommended that the changes should be rolled out to other vehicle categories and to the ADI part 2 driving test. Instructors take a 3-part examination - a theory test, a test of driving ability, and a practical test of driving instruction. This change would apply to the second of these.

Responses from those who had taken part in the trials were encouraging. They did, however, express concern about waiting times and recommended that these changes are not introduced until the average waiting time for car practical tests is below 7.4 weeks - the figure targeted in DVSA's business plan for 2016 to 2017.

NASP released a statement saying that they:

“consider that it is imperative that the new test assesses a candidate’s ability to manage the risks of real life driving and should be fully prepared, when coming to test, to manage such manoeuvres – as they are also core competences stipulated in the national standard for driving cars and light vans (category B). We look forward to the introduction of an improved driving test once the wait for car driving tests is reduced below 7.4 weeks.”

This statement was supported by other ADI Associations.



## Comments on particular issues raised

There were various specific issues raised on which we would comment as follows.

### Road signs on the independent drive

Some respondents were concerned that the use of a sat nav would remove the requirement to follow road signs during the independent drive. The ability to read signs was a valuable driving skill which could be lost if it was not included in the driving test.

This is not the intention. After introduction of the new test, we intend to include the candidate following road signs in one in 5 tests. This will encourage the continued training in following road signs in preparation for the test.

### Length of the independent drive

Some respondents felt that the proposed change to the independent drive would mean that, at 20 minutes, it was too long a proportion of the overall test and could put additional pressure on candidates.

We don't believe this to be the case. It's our view that a longer, more focused, drive will have significant benefits. The additional time available, together with the use of sat navs avoiding reliance exclusively on road signs, will enable a wider variety of roads to be used in the test, testing candidates in more rural areas, and on higher speed roads, than has hitherto been the case.

This will be one of the key advantages of the proposals. We don't envisage it causing additional pressure. During this part of the test, candidates will be able to navigate their own journeys and to fully demonstrate their ability to drive without direction from the examiner. We will, however, monitor this possibility and whether there is action we need to take.

## Inclusion of sat nav

Some respondents pointed to a sat nav being a distraction that it should therefore not be included in the test.

Our view is that we recognise that sat navs are an increasingly popular tool for use in navigation and that the driving test should prepare candidates for their use. We also recognise that sat navs can be a distraction and, in view of this, it's important to train and test to deal with this distraction. This is a key part of the rationale behind introducing sat navs into the test.

DVSA will provide the sat navs for use during the test and the examiner will ensure these are positioned appropriately and safely.

The introduction of the sat nav will also allow candidates to be observed in a more realistic driving environment, where they are not distracted by intervention by the examiner and can focus entirely on the driving task. The use of sat navs is also key to the benefits, explained above, that, by avoiding the necessity of using road signs, it will widen the areas that can be used in the test.

Some commented that there may be a conflict between the instructions given by a sat nav and the pertaining road traffic conditions. One of the reasons for the introduction of the sat nav is to evaluate the candidate's ability to assess a situation as it presents itself on test. The examiner would expect the candidate to take the safest and most appropriate action in the situation, not simply to follow the instructions of the sat nav without question.

It was also raised that the sat nav won't provide directions in Welsh. We've explored the option of using a sat nav that does this. Unfortunately there is not a sat nav product available in Welsh. The choice is therefore whether the benefits of including a sat nav for the majority of tests should be adopted or if we should relinquish this until a sat nav in Welsh is available.

We consider it would be preferable to introduce the sat nav for those tests where this is possible. We will watch the market and, if the product is available in Welsh, we will consider, at the time, if this provides an effective and economical option.

## Manoeuvres

There were comments relating to the potential safety, and The Highway Code recommendation, regarding the new pulling-up-on-the-right manoeuvre, the reverse-out-of-a-parking-space going against traditional advice, the continued usefulness of the turn-in-the-road (and, to a lesser extent the reverse-around-corner), the suggestion that we include a manoeuvre on vulnerable road users and the difficulty of testing in supermarket car parks.

Our view is that, while The Highway Code advises not to park against the flow of traffic, the pulling-up-on-the-right manoeuvre involves stopping as a temporary measure for the purpose of conducting the exercise alone. It does not imply parking for any length of time in that position.

The intention is to deliver the exercise in a format that is not uncommon but is more challenging, designed to test the ability of candidates to negotiate modern road traffic conditions in a safe, effective manner.

Concerning the traditional exercises, the turn-in-the-road has proved beneficial over many years in assessing the expertise of learner drivers. The same applies to the reverse-around-the-corner. However, the manoeuvres incorporate transferrable skills, such as the ability to reverse, to take account of road and traffic conditions and to decide on the best time to pull out onto the road. These skills are all tested in the proposed revised exercises which simply update the traditional format and test the skills needed in a slightly different way.

With regard to parking, we continue to view reversing into a car parking space as best practice. However, the driving test needs to assess a candidate's ability to manoeuvre a vehicle within conditions they are likely to encounter in the course of day to day driving.

Driving forward into a space and reversing out is perfectly legal and a practice followed by many drivers. It's important that drivers are equipped with the skills they may use, so they know the pitfalls to avoid, thereby increasing safety.

We acknowledge that there may be some practical challenges from testing in supermarket car parks on all occasions. However, this is not essential. A wide variety of car parking facilities can be used on the test, not necessarily based at supermarkets.



Our local managers are undertaking research into the range of available car parks in the areas covering each test centre. We are also engaging with national car parking stakeholders to seek to agree a joint approach to using local car parks for part of the test.

With regard to vulnerable road users, such as horse riders and cyclists, we seek to assess how a candidate interacts with other drivers and riders, including situations requiring particular attention, in the normal course of the test.

If we were to introduce a specific manoeuvre to address this, it would be necessary for such scenarios to be available on every test. This is likely to be unrealistic. In view of this, we prefer to continue with the present arrangement, where they are included in the test if the situation allows.

## **Vehicle safety questions**

Some respondents expressed concern regarding the:

- potential distraction for candidates from asking questions during the drive
- issue of special needs
- facilities available on some vehicles compared with others
- fact that some candidates may be unfamiliar with the layout of the test vehicle (for example if the vehicle is a replacement for their regular one)

Some also asked about questions on passing vulnerable road users, including horses.

We don't consider that asking 'on the move' questions will cause unnecessary distraction for candidates. Conversely, we believe that this will be valuable preparation for their career as drivers.

Immediately candidates have passed the test, and are able to drive unaccompanied, they will need to operate controls such as demisters, headlights and windscreen wipers, along with ancillary functions like the radio. The candidate will benefit from training on how and when to operate ancillary controls safely.

Special needs issues have been discussed with stakeholders and representatives.

Representatives attended an event hosted by DVSA, which explained the issues involved and described the new test. These organisations were satisfied that this had been considered, any problems resolved and supported the changes.

We recognise that there can be occasions where some candidates are unfamiliar with the vehicle in which they are taking their test. However, we don't consider this to be a significant barrier to a successful performance in the test.

These questions will cover the operation of basic ancillary controls which are fitted in all vehicles, so there should be sufficient familiarity with them to enable safe use.

It's also likely that, during a driving career, a driver will need to operate an unfamiliar vehicle (for example, a hire car). This proposal is designed to provide effective preparation for such an event.

With regard to the suggestion about how to approach vulnerable road users, questions covering this area are already included in the theory test. Hazard perception testing is also aimed at preparing candidates for driving on the road and addressing any potential hazards they may see – this includes vulnerable road users.



## Decisions taken

We'd like to thank those who responded to the consultation. There were many helpful and informative points made and these have proved instructive in the decision making process. We are also grateful for the suggestions on issues outside the scope of this consultation.

We've considered carefully the views expressed. They have taken into account points made by consultees. These include the suggestion from some of the driver training associations that the new test is not introduced until the average waiting time is below 7.4 weeks, the figure targeted in the DVSA business plan 2016 to 2017.

Over the past few months, DVSA has been working to reduce waiting times. During 2016 to 2017, the peak national average waiting time was 11.9 weeks; in March 2017 this had almost halved to 6 weeks. At the time of implementation in December 2017, the national waiting time is forecast to be 6 weeks. To reduce any negative impact from the new test, we intend that examiner training is undertaken in low demand periods and that these changes are replicated in the ADI part 2 test.

We have also taken into account the suggestion by the driving instructor national associations that the changes are replicated in the ADI part 2 test. This would ensure that instructors are familiar with the test to be taken by their pupils and are driving to a similar standards. This has merit and we'll informally consult with the instructor trainers about the suggestion.

Given the outcome of the research trial and the consultation, however, we have decided to introduce the changes in the practical test taken by learner drivers for tests taken from 4 December 2017.



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