

Brake and AXA UK driver survey reports

Driver testing and education



In May 2023, Brake and AXA UK asked 2,010* car drivers about driver testing and education. The survey was carried out by independent market research company SurveyGoo.

*Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

In this, the second report in partnership with road safety charity Brake, we address the issue of driver education.



As a forward-looking major vehicle insurer, it's important to us that we understand the views, concerns and asks of the UK's motorists and how they change over time. We draw on this insight to ensure our new products and propositions truly reflect the evolving needs of our customers.

This research is timely as so much has changed in recent years and there will be many more changes and developments to come. The UK driving test and Highway Code are constantly evolving. The test was made compulsory for new drivers in 1935, the theory test was introduced in 1996, with a hazard perception section being added in 2002. The Highway Code, which was first published in 1931, applies to all road users, and is regularly updated. Notably the 2022 edition included a new 'hierarchy of road users'.

What we see on the UK's roads has changed dramatically in recent years. We now see many more cycle lanes and cycle superhighways, 20 mph zones in a growing number of urban areas and, local schemes such as 'low traffic neighbourhoods' which restrict car use. It seems highly likely that change will continue apace, not least with the concept of the 15-minute city currently being hotly debated.

The type of vehicles we see on our roads has also radically changed in recent years, with hybrids, EVs and increasing levels of automation as we edge ever closer to fully self-driving vehicles.

Our research focuses on the UK driving test and Highway Code. We asked motorists for their views and knowledge of both and on the recent changes which have been introduced. We then sought their views on lifelong testing. Should tests be more regular, age related and whether the frequency of eye tests was a concern? We asked about graduated testing, a model that is the norm in a number of countries, and looked at issues including alcohol levels, motorway and night-time driving. Lastly, we looked at the process of booking a driving test in the UK.

This research raises a number of issues which deserve consideration by the Government and its relevant agencies. There is clear support for the introduction of graduated driver testing. Other issues that must be addressed include the current driving test backlog and the impact this is having on the pockets of motorists, and potentially road safety. We call on the Government to convene a high level strategic review of driver education, testing and licensing.

Jon Walker

AXA UK Commercial CEO



Could you still pass your test?



We all worked hard to pass our driving test - we studied the Highway Code, spent many hours with an instructor and/or a family member practising and learning to drive, and some of us will even have studied for and passed our theory test. But once we received our 'pass', how many of us continued that level of learning?

Nearly a quarter of drivers surveyed said they were unsure if they could pass their practical driving test – with 35% saying the same about the theory test. This asks the question: Do we, or should we ever, stop learning to drive?

Recently, the Highway Code was updated with aspects such as the hierarchy of road users. Despite this information being shared publicly, our research has shown that not everyone has good knowledge of the rules of the road – including 71% who couldn't identify the correct distance they should keep from the car in front.

It's clear that something must be done to support drivers throughout their driving life. Brake has long called for a phased approach to licensing for young drivers and this report confirms that the majority of people feel the same. Nearly two-thirds (63%) would

support a phased licensing system for 17–24 year old drivers as a way to safeguard them. A system of this kind could include introducing a minimum learning period, a minimum amount of on-road practice, and motorway lessons before people passed their test. And then, after passing, there could be a period of time where they could only drive during certain hours of the day, have only a certain number or type of passengers, and not have any alcohol in their system while driving.

This report by Brake explores the different types and levels of post-test learning: how did we learn to drive and how long ago was it? It then challenges us all to keep our skills and knowledge up to date before asking the question: How can we keep our young and newly qualified drivers safe?

Ross Moorlock

Interim CEO, Brake



In this report, we explored the attitudes of car drivers to driver testing and education. We sought to determine driver views on test standards and tuition, with a focus on lifelong learning, fitness to drive and phased approaches to licensing.

We also explored opinions on the current UK driving test and knowledge of the Highway Code.

For more data tables to support the information given in this report, go to www.brake.org.uk/driver-testing-and-education.

Section 1 - Driving tests and tuition



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Driver testing and education

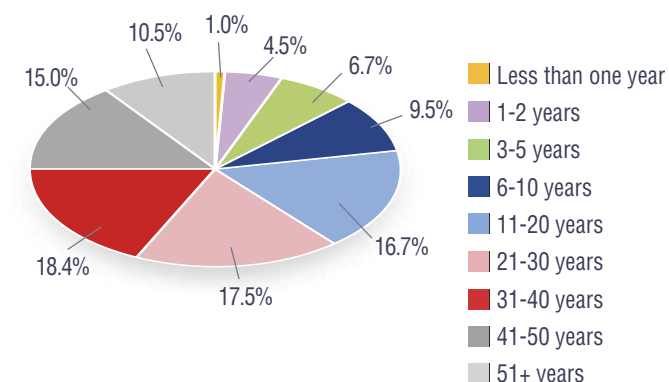
In this section, we asked people how long it had been since they passed their driving test. We asked about driving experience prior to taking the test, and whether they have had additional training since passing. We also asked for views on the current UK driving test.

In question 1, we asked people how long it had been since they passed their driving test.

The majority of respondents (61%) told us they passed their driving tests more than 20 years ago. A small minority (6%) of respondents can be classed as 'newly qualified drivers', having passed their driving test within the last two years. The length of time since passing a driving test corresponds closely to the age distribution of respondents: 17-24-year-olds comprised only 7% of respondents overall, whereas drivers aged 45 and older comprised 61% of survey respondents.

Respondents who said they had not passed their driving test were not eligible to complete the survey.

Q1. How long is it since you passed your driving test?



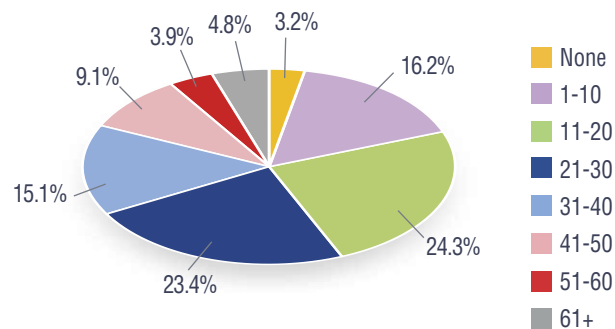
Section 1 - Driving tests and tuition

In question 2, we asked how many hours of driving lessons people had with a qualified driving instructor before they passed their driving test, and whether they felt that was sufficient.

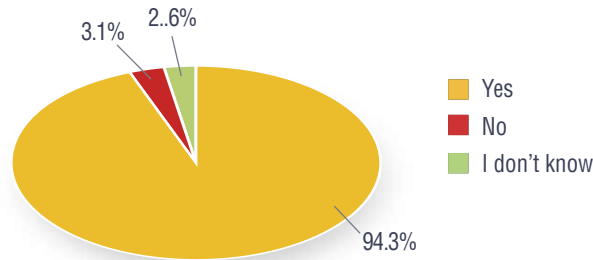
The most popular option was 11–20 hours, which was picked by about a quarter (24%) of respondents. A further 23% picked 21–30 hours. A small percentage (3%) told us they hadn't had any driving lessons with a qualified driving instructor.

When we asked whether drivers felt they had enough driving lessons with a qualified driving instructor, the vast majority (94%) said yes, with clear consensus across all age groups and regions.

Q2a. Before you passed your driving test, how many hours of driving lessons did you have with a qualified driving instructor?



Q2b. Do you think you had enough driving lessons with a qualified driving instructor?

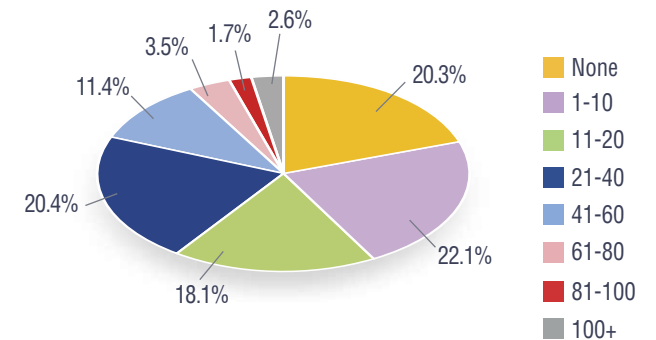


In question 3, we asked how many hours of supervised on-road practice people had, for example with a parent or other licensed driver, before they passed their driving test, and whether they felt that was sufficient.

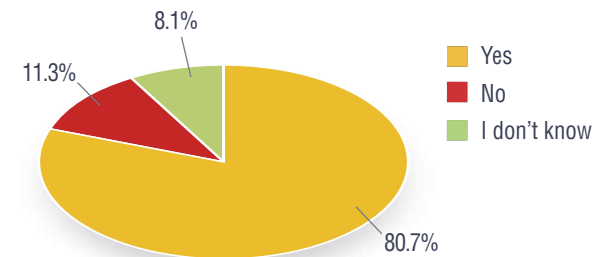
Roughly a fifth (22%) of all respondents said they had 1–10 hours of supervised on-road practice, 18% had 11–20 hours, and 20% had 21–40 hours. A further fifth (20%) had no supervised on-road practice before passing their test.

Again, when we asked if they considered this to be enough, most respondents (81%) said yes.

Q3a. Before you passed your driving test, how many hours of supervised on-road practice did you have, for example with a parent or other licensed driver?



Q3b. Do you think you had enough hours of supervised on-road practice?



Young and newly qualified drivers are at greater risk on roads

Young and newly qualified drivers are high-risk road users and often over-represented in collision data. In Britain, drivers aged 17-24, make up only 6% of total licence holders yet represent 18% of all car drivers killed and seriously injured.^{1,2}

There are many reasons for this, including the way in which the brain develops during adolescence and into early adulthood, overconfidence, inexperience and a tendency to take risks.

According to Government data, one in five drivers crashes within their first year on the road.³ Research by the Transport Select Committee suggests that gaining 7,500 miles of driving experience could reduce crash risk by up to 36%.⁴

It takes time and practice to build the skills and experience necessary to operate a vehicle safely in different road conditions, and to recognise and respond safely to hazards when they arise.

Brake has long recommended that all learner drivers have a minimum of 10 hours of professional tuition before taking their test, so it is encouraging to see that 80% of survey respondents have had 11 or more hours of driving lessons with a qualified driving instructor.⁵

On the flip side, it is worrying to see that one in five people had no supervised driving experience with a parent or other licensed driver before taking their test.

1. DVLA (2023) GB Driving licence data. Table DRL0101. Provisional and Full driving licences held, by age and by gender, Great Britain
2. DfT (2022) Reported road casualties Great Britain. Annual report 2021 and associated data sets
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-looks-at-steps-to-make-new-drivers-safer>
4. House of Commons Transport Select Committee (2021), Road safety: young and novice drivers. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmtrans/169/169.pdf>
5. Brake (2019) Brake submission to Transport Select Committee inquiry, 2019



Section 1 - Driving tests and tuition



In question 4, we asked whether drivers had completed any additional driver training since passing their test.

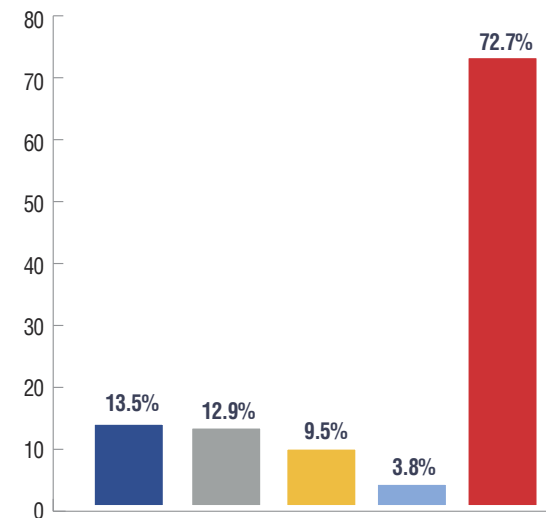
We gave a selection of training programmes available to anyone who has passed the UK driving test, and asked respondents to tick all that applied.

More than a quarter (27%) told us they have had additional driver training, of which 36% were men and 18% were women. There was a clear age difference, with younger age groups more likely to have had additional training. Regionally, drivers in London appear to be more likely to complete extra training after passing their test, with 57% of respondents in the capital saying they have had some additional driver training, compared with a national average of 27%.

Although there is no clear evidence that post-licensing driver education prevents road crashes,⁶ Brake urges all drivers to continue to improve their driving skills and knowledge, to keep themselves and other road users safe.

For full data tables, go to www.brake.org.uk/driver-testing-and-education.

Q4. Since passing your driving test, have you had any additional driver training? (tick all that apply)



- Advanced driver training
- Refresher training with a qualified driving instructor
- Pass Plus driver training
- Other
- I haven't had any additional driver training

6. Ker, K., et al. (2008) Post-licence driver education for the prevention of road traffic crashes. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2003, Issue 3. Art. No.:CD003734. DOI:10.1002/14651858.CD003734.

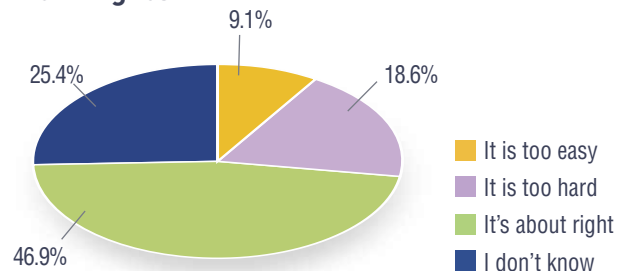
Section 1 - Driving tests and tuition

In question 5, we explored how drivers felt about the UK driving test. We wanted to know whether they thought it was too easy or hard, and whether they believed they could pass a theory or practical driving test.

Around half (47%) of survey respondents said they felt that the current UK driving is about the right difficulty level. We saw surprisingly mixed feelings from the rest of the respondents: around a fifth (19%) said they thought the test is too hard, 9% said it is too easy and 25% said they don't know.

On the whole, we saw levels of uncertainty about the difficulty level of the UK driving test increase steadily with age. For example, only 2% of drivers aged 23–24 gave 'I don't know' as their response, compared with more than half (52%) of drivers aged 75 or older. This most likely represents the amount of time since they took their test.

Q5a. How do you feel about the current UK driving test?



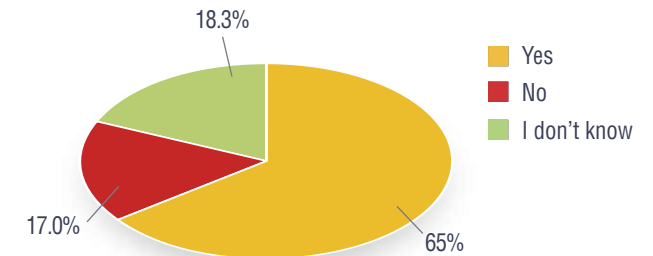
Despite 47% of respondents saying they felt the UK driving test is about the right difficulty level, more than a third (35%) of drivers said they weren't sure they could pass a UK driving theory test.



Unsurprisingly, newly qualified drivers are more confident they could pass their theory test, with more than 80% in every age category below the age of 35 saying they could. This fell considerably in older age groups; only 43% of drivers aged 75 or older said they thought they could pass the theory test.

It's worth noting that the theory test was introduced as part of the UK driving test in 1996. Any drivers older than 45 at the time of completing the survey will not have taken a theory test. Despite this, 60% of drivers aged 45–54 said they thought they could pass the theory test.

Q5b. Do you think you could still pass a UK driving test (theory)?

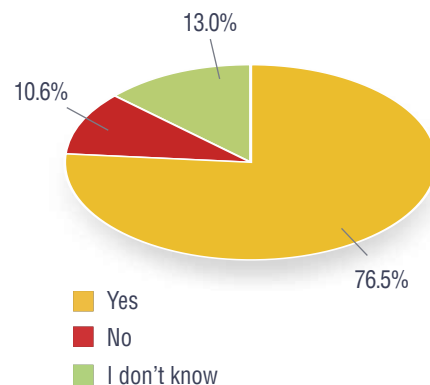


Section 1 - Driving tests and tuition

Of much greater concern, however, is the fact that around one in ten (11%) of drivers said they didn't think they could pass the UK driving practical test. A further 13% told us they weren't sure they could pass the test.

Drivers' confidence in their ability to pass the practical test varied with age. More than 90% of respondents aged 20-24 said they would be able to pass a practical test. Confidence then dropped steadily with increasing age, although there was a spike for drivers age 75+, of whom 79% said they could still pass their practical test.

Q5c. Do you think you could still pass a UK driving test (practical)?



1 in 10



drivers don't think they could pass
a UK driving practical test

For full data tables, go to

www.brake.org.uk/driver-testing-and-education.

Section 2 - How much do drivers know about the Highway Code?

In this section, we explored how much drivers know about the Highway Code. We wanted to see whether they were aware of recent updates to improve the safety of people who walk and cycle, and whether they understood some of the rules of the road.

In question 6, we asked drivers to indicate whether or not the Highway Code included a number of statements.

Overall, drivers showed a good level of knowledge of the recent updates to the Highway Code:

- ✓ **97%** know drivers and cyclists must give way to pedestrians on a zebra crossing, and to pedestrians and cyclists on parallel crossings.
- ✓ **80%** know that on narrow sections of road, on quiet roads, at road junctions and in slower-moving traffic, cyclists can ride in the centre of the lane, to make themselves as visible as possible.

- ✓ **81%** know only pedestrians (including people who use wheelchair and mobility scooters) may use the pavement.
- ✓ **94%** know drivers must leave at least 1.5 metres when overtaking cyclists at speeds of up to 30mph, and give them more space when overtaking at higher speeds.

Responses were broadly consistent across all age ranges and regions of the UK.



Section 2 - How much do drivers know about the Highway Code?

In questions 7 and 8, we tested driver knowledge by asking two questions taken from the practice theory test for car drivers. We then asked in question 9 about default speed limits for different UK roads.

In question 7 we asked: You're approaching a roundabout. What should you do if a cyclist ahead is signalling to turn right?

- ✗ Overtake on the right – **5%**
- ✗ Give a warning with a horn – **7%**
- ✗ Signal the cyclist to move across – **6%**
- ✓ Give the cyclist plenty of room – **83%**

Cyclists are vulnerable on roads

Responses to questions 6 and 7 indicate that most drivers have good knowledge of the Highway Code and understand about how to behave around cyclists.

However, we also know that cyclists remain one of the most vulnerable groups of road users. In 2021, 111 cyclists were killed and 4353 seriously injured on roads in Britain. This made up 7% of road deaths and 17% of serious injuries on roads in 2021.⁷ Previous research by Brake found most drivers report never or very rarely cycling on single-carriageway roads because of the risks involved, but that 53% would be more likely to cycle on these roads if there were dedicated cycle paths.⁸



7. DfT (2022) Reported road casualties Great Britain. Annual report 2021 and associated data sets

8. Brake and Direct Line (2018), Safe Roads Between Places - Our Strategic Road Network Pt.1. <https://www.brake.org.uk/files/downloads/Reports/Direct-Line-Safe-Driving/Roads-between-places-Direct-Line-Safe-Driving-Report-2018.pdf?v=1602865507>

Victims' voices: Katy

In April 2018, Katy was hit by a car and knocked off her bike on a roundabout near her home. She suffered extensive bruising and shock. The driver of the car admitted culpability for the collision.

The collision affected Katy's confidence about getting back on her bike. She remembers the initial feeling of terror after being hit by the car and falling to the floor, not knowing whether she had been injured severely. If Katy had not been wearing a helmet, the outcome of the crash may have been quite different. Since the crash, Katy realises she was lucky not to be severely injured and feels it has taken a lot of determination to be able to regain the confidence to get back on her bike.

Katy says: "Unsafe roads impact all road users. My story shows that crashes are indiscriminate. We must remember that our roads are used by everyone, and as a cyclist I often feel vulnerable because of close passes. Drivers need to take particular care to protect people cycling and on foot."

Katy continues to feel vulnerable on her bike, experiencing regular near-misses because of drivers passing too close.



In 2021, **111** cyclists were killed and 4353 seriously injured on roads in Britain.



Section 2 - How much do drivers know about the Highway Code?

In question 8 we asked: You're driving on an open road in dry weather. What distance should you keep from the vehicle in front?

- ✓ A two-second gap – **29%**
- ✗ One car length – **16%**
- ✗ Two metres (6 feet 6 inches) – **11%**
- ✗ Two car lengths – **43%**

Speed, stopping distances and the risk of injury

It's concerning that only 29% of people answered question 8 correctly. The majority of respondents believe that they can drive much closer to the vehicle in front than is safe. This also suggests that people don't understand the link between speed and stopping distances.

The faster a vehicle is travelling, the longer it takes to stop, and the greater the risk of a crash. Speed and stopping distances don't increase at the same rate. Small increases in speed result in bigger increases in stopping distances.

The higher the speed a vehicle travels, the greater the likelihood of serious injury or death if there is a crash. The risk of injury increases exponentially with impact speed. A crash at 30mph involves a lot more energy and destructive potential than a crash at 20mph.

The most popular answer to question 8 was 'two car lengths' which is only about 8 metres. Even at speeds as low as 20mph, the stopping distance is 12 metres, and it rises to 23 metres at 30mph. At 70mph, the stopping distance is 96 metres, although research by Brake suggests it could be even higher.⁹



9. Cuerden, R. (2017). The mechanics of emergency braking. TRL. www.brake.org.uk/get-involved/take-action/mybrake/knowledge-centre/speed/stopping-distances

Section 2 - How much do drivers know about the Highway Code?

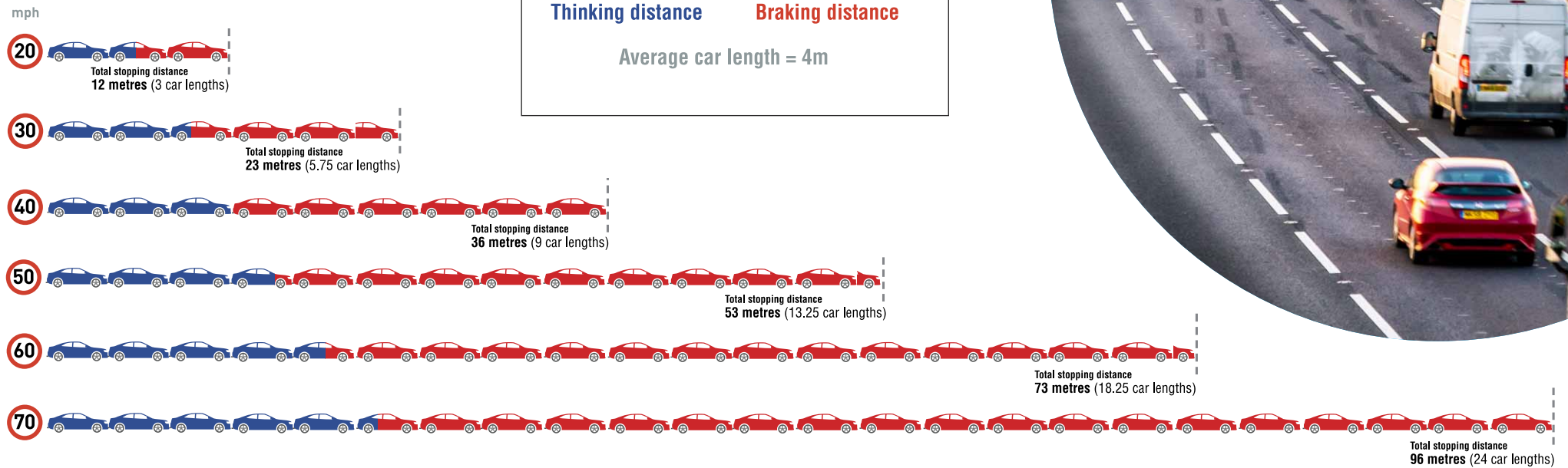


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71% of drivers don't know what distance to keep from a vehicle in front of them



Stopping distances



Section 2 - How much do drivers know about the Highway Code?



In question 9 we asked: What is the default national speed limit for cars on the following UK roads?

✓ **81%**

correctly identified the speed limit on motorways as 70mph.

✓ **41%**

correctly identified the speed limit on on dual carriageways as 70mph.

✓ **45%**

correctly identified the speed limit on single carriageways as 60mph.

✓ **84%**

correctly identified the speed limit on roads in built-up areas as 30mph.

We found that although drivers have good awareness of the national speed limit for some road types – 81% can correctly identify the speed limit for motorways and 84% can do so for roads in built-up areas – there is a lack of knowledge of speed limits for dual- and single-carriageway roads, and this is cause for concern.

Only 41% of respondents know that the default national speed limit for dual carriageways is 70mph, and only 45% know that the speed limit for single carriageways is 60mph.

It's particularly worrying that 16% of drivers think the speed limit for roads in built-up areas is 40mph or above, especially as most road safety experts agree that even the current default national speed limit (30mph) is too high. Speed is a critical issue for the safety of roads. Many towns and cities across the UK are implementing 20mph speed limits to make roads safer for people who walk and cycle.^{10, 11}

We saw quite significant variation in responses from drivers in London, who were less able to correctly identify the default national speed limits for motorways (37%), dual carriageways (18%), single carriageways (22%) and roads in built-up areas (47%), compared with the national averages shown above.

16% of drivers think the speed limit for roads in built-up areas is 40mph or above. The default national speed limit for these roads is 30mph.

10. <https://tfl.gov.uk/corporate/safety-and-security/road-safety/safe-speeds#on-this-page-2>
11. https://www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/download/1871/transport_strategy_for_manchester_city_centre

Section 3 - Fitness to drive and lifelong learning

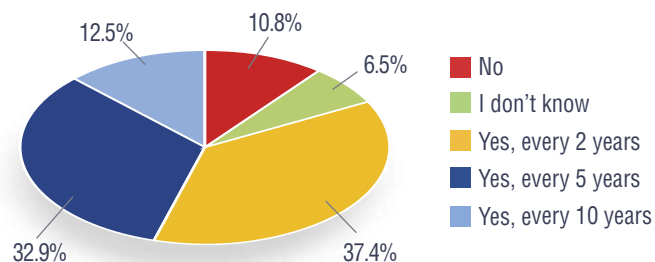
In this section, we asked about additional tests for drivers, aiming to establish whether people think drivers should have their vision and driving skills tested regularly, or when they reach a certain age.

In question 10, we asked if all drivers should be required by law to have their vision tested by an optician on a regular basis, and how often this should happen.

We saw overwhelming support for regular sight tests by opticians, with 83% of drivers agreeing that all drivers should be required by law to have their vision tested by an optician on a regular basis.

When considering how often sight tests should happen, 37% said every 2 years, 33% said every 5 years and 13% said every 10 years.

Q10. Do you think all drivers should be required by law to have their vision tested by an optician on a regular basis?



The importance of regular sight tests

The law states you must be able to read a number plate from 20 metres to drive, but this test only checks vision over distance, and not visual field or contrast sensitivity – both of which are important for safe driving.

Eyesight can deteriorate significantly without you realising it. Brake recommends that all drivers get their eyes tested with an optician at least every two years, or straight away if they think there may be a problem.¹² Drivers must also notify the DVLA of certain eye conditions that affect their vision.¹³

In the UK, you can be fined up to £1,000 if you don't tell the DVLA about a medical condition that affects your driving. If you are involved in a crash as a result, you may be prosecuted.

83%

agree drivers should be required by law to have their vision tested regularly by an optician

12. <https://www.brake.org.uk/get-involved/take-action/mybrake/knowledge-centre/roadmap-to-safe-and-healthy-journeys/checking-your-fitness-to-drive-or-ride>

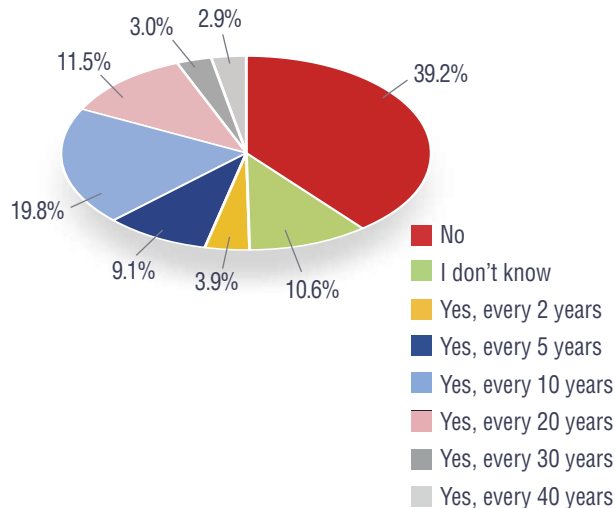
13. <https://www.gov.uk/eye-conditions-and-driving>

Section 3 - Fitness to drive and lifelong learning

In question 11, we asked if all drivers should be required by law to re-take their driving test on a regular basis and how often this should happen.

Half of respondents (50%) agreed that all drivers should be required by law to re-take their driving test on a regular basis, with 20% favouring regular re-testing every 10 years. There was a strong consensus across all age groups and regions for this.

Q11. Do you think all drivers should be required by law to re-take their driving test on a regular basis?



Older drivers

As people get older, some will develop age-related conditions that affect their driving, including eyesight and reaction times. This is different for everyone, there isn't an age at which it automatically becomes unsafe to drive, and, in general, experienced drivers are safer than people with less experience.

Many drivers recognise that their driving ability is changing, and decide for themselves how much they should drive, or when to stop driving altogether (this is known as 'self-regulation').¹⁴

All drivers are required to renew their licence when they reach the age of 70, and every three years afterwards, if they want to continue driving.¹⁵ As stated earlier (see page 15), all drivers are also required by law to report any medical conditions that may affect their driving to the DVLA.¹⁶

While there is clearly an appetite for change, and strong support from survey respondents (especially those in younger age groups) in favour of mandatory re-testing, there is no evidence that this would actually make drivers safer.¹⁷



14. <https://olderdrivers.org.uk/>

15. <https://www.gov.uk/renew-driving-licence-at-70>

16. <https://www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving>

17. Ker, K., et al. (2008) Post-licence driver education for the prevention of road traffic crashes. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2003, Issue 3. Art. No.:CD003734. DOI:10.1002/14651858.CD003734.

Section 3 - Fitness to drive and lifelong learning

In question 12, we asked if all drivers should be required by law to re-take their driving test when they reach a certain age, and, if so, at what age this should happen.

We found that 58% of drivers support re-taking driving test at a certain age, with majority support across all ages except 65–74-year-olds (41%) and those aged 75 and over (27%).

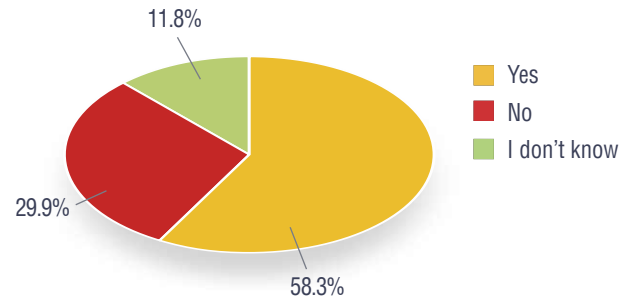
Across the country, support for drivers re-taking their test ranged from 50% in Scotland to 68% in Wales.

When we asked all those who had answered yes to question 12a, at what age drivers should be required to re-take their driving test, we saw a greater variation.

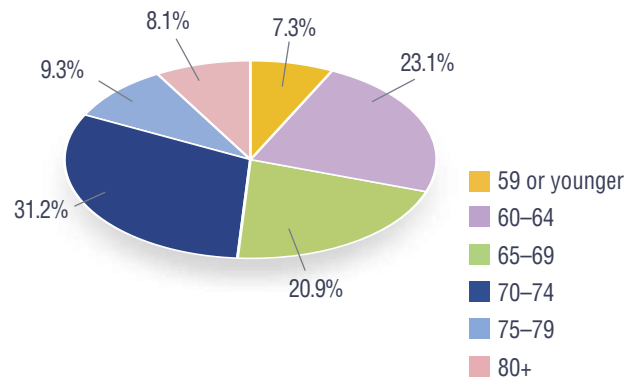
The most popular option was age 70–74, which was picked by 31% of respondents. This was the top choice for all older age groups, and was selected by 47% of 55–64-year-olds, 43% of 65–74-year-olds, and 36% of respondents aged 75 and over.

Some of the younger groups selected a lower age for re-testing: 37% of 23–24-year-olds and 41% of 25–34-year-olds said they thought drivers should be required to re-take their driving test at age 60–64.

Q12a. Do you think all drivers should be required by law to re-take their driving test when they reach a certain age?



Q12b. At what age do you think drivers should be required to re-take their driving test?



14. <https://olderdrivers.org.uk/>

15. <https://www.gov.uk/renew-driving-licence-at-70>

16. <https://www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving>

17. Ker, K., et al. (2008) Post-licence driver education for the prevention of road traffic crashes. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2003, Issue 3. Art. No.:CD003734. DOI:10.1002/14651858.CD003734.



Section 4 - A progressive approach to driver licensing

In this section, we asked questions about phased licensing systems in the UK. We wanted to know whether drivers would support the introduction of such a system, and which elements of the system they might favour.

In question 13, we gave some information about phased approaches to obtaining a full driving licence that have been adopted in many counties, with proven safety benefits, and asked drivers whether they would support the introduction of such a system.

Phased licensing systems require the learner to undertake different measures such as a minimum period learning and a minimum number of hours of supervised driving before taking their test. Many schemes restrict newly licensed drivers from driving at night or carrying passengers, and also impose lower alcohol limits.

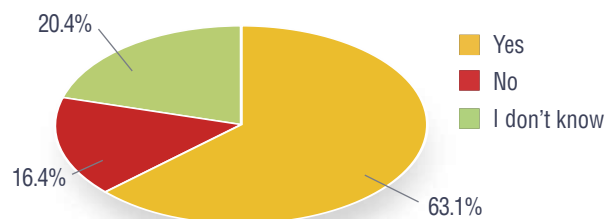
Almost two-thirds (63%) of respondents said they would support the introduction of a phased licensing system in the UK, with majority support across all age groups.

18. https://www.racfoundation.org/assets/rac_foundation/content/downloadables/ipsos_mori_young_driver_safety_survey_final_june_2014.pdf

19. https://www.racfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/Supporting_new_drivers_in_GB_Helman_et_al_Oct_2022.pdf

20. House of Commons Transport Select Committee (2021), Road safety: young and novice drivers. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmtrans/169/169.pdf>

Q13. Would you support the introduction of a phased driver licensing scheme in the UK?



63%
of drivers would support the introduction of a phased licensing system in the UK

Support for a phased licensing system, often also known as graduated driver licensing (GDL), appears to have increased among young drivers since a 2014 poll on behalf of the RAC Foundation, which found 41% of 16–24-year-olds supported introducing GDL and 32% were against.¹⁸ In this survey, 79% of 17–19-year-olds, 64% of 20–22-year-olds and 66% of 23–24-year-olds told us they would support a phased licensing system.

While there is sometimes more scepticism about specific measures, there is also evidence that younger drivers are more supportive of a phased licensing system when it is understood as part of safety measures for managing risk, rather than about restricting them on roads.¹⁹

Phased licensing reduces road risk for young, novice drivers

The introduction of phased licensing systems around the world has shown a reduction in road deaths from drivers aged 17–24.

A 2021 Transport Select Committee report examined the evidence of Ontario and New Zealand's phased licensing schemes:

“In Ontario, Canada, the introduction of a GDL scheme – which includes a 12 month minimum learning period, a lowered blood alcohol limit, and night-time restrictions – saw a 42% reduction in crashes among those aged 20 to 24. In New Zealand, a form of GDL— including a six month minimum learning period, a lower blood alcohol limit for drivers under 20, night-time driving restrictions and a restriction on carrying any passengers for the first six months of driving—resulted in a 23% reduction in car crash injuries for 15 to 19 year olds and a 12% reduction for 20 to 24 year olds.”²⁰

Section 4 - A progressive approach to driver licensing

In question 14, we then asked about some of the specific measures that have been proposed to improve road safety for new drivers.

We found that:



38% agree learner drivers should have a minimum learning period of at least 12 months before they can take their test.



42% agree that for 6 months after passing their test, new drivers should not be allowed to drive in the dark without a supervising driver.



46% agree learner drivers should need to have at least 100 hours of on-road practice before they can take their test.



46% agree that for 6 months after passing their test, new drivers should not be allowed to carry passengers under 25 without a supervising driver.



81% agree learner drivers should be required to have practice driving on motorways before they can take their test.



80% agree that for 6 months after passing their test, new drivers should not be allowed to drink any alcohol if driving.

There was majority support across all age groups for restricting alcohol after passing a test, and for requiring practice driving on motorways before taking a test.

It's also worth noting that although 46% of respondents agree that learner drivers should have at least 100 hours of on-road practice, this is considerably more than drivers told us they actually had in questions 2 and 3 (see page 4).

On other elements, older drivers appear more likely to support these measures than younger drivers, which is no great surprise – earlier in this report (see page 17), we saw younger drivers were more likely to favour restrictions for older drivers (for example mandatory re-testing).

It is notable though that, overall, there appears to be collective support for the principle of introducing measures that help safeguard young and novice drivers, even if people may be less willing to take individual responsibility.

For full data tables, go to www.brake.org.uk/driver-testing-and-education.

The law and the limits of drink-driving in the UK

In England and Wales, it's legal to drive with a blood-alcohol concentration (BAC) of 80 milligrams of alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood (80mg/100ml).

This is the highest limit in Europe. In Scotland, the blood alcohol limit is 50mg/100ml, and in many countries it is even lower. Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic do not allow drivers to drink any alcohol.

Drivers are six times more likely to be involved in a fatal crash if they have 50-80mg alcohol per 100ml blood compared to 0mg, and three times more likely to die on roads if they have 20-50mg alcohol per 100ml of blood compared to 0mg.

Of the 150 fatal crashes involving a driver with illegal blood alcohol levels in 2020, 30 of the drivers were under the age of 25. A further 200 of the 870 car crashes involving a drink-driver, and causing serious injuries, involved a driver under the age of 25.

Young people aged 20-29 are the most likely age group to be involved in drink-drive crashes, and are nearly 22 times more likely to be involved in a drink-drive crash than drivers aged 60 or over. For context, in 2020, per billion miles driven, 20-24-year-olds were involved in 87 crashes, compared with just four for those aged 60 or over.²¹

In question 15, we asked which of a list of measures drivers would like to see implemented as part of the driver learning and licensing process, either required by law or encouraged.

51% support a legal requirement for learner drivers to complete a minimum number of hours with a qualified driving instructor before taking their driving test.

61% support a legal requirement for learner drivers to complete hazard perception training before taking their driving test.

38% support a legal requirement for learner drivers to use a set of materials to help them understand and agree voluntary limits on their driving for 6 months after passing their driving test (e.g. not driving in the dark or carrying passengers).

For full data tables, go to www.brake.org.uk/driver-testing-and-education.

21. Department for Transport (2022), Reported drinking and driving: table RAS2022

22. McKenna and Crick (1997), TRL Report 297 – Developments in hazard perception.

23. Roberts et al. (2021) The effect of hazard awareness training on teen drivers of varying socioeconomic status. Traffic Injury Prevention. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15389588.2021.1940984>

Hazard perception tests

Younger drivers are more likely to crash in their first year of driving, and experience on the road helps to reduce the risks associated with driving.

Research has shown that among drivers of a similar age, those with more experience are better at responding to potential hazards than drivers with less experience. Hazard perception training is widely accepted among the road safety industry as an effective way to improve driver safety.^{22,23}



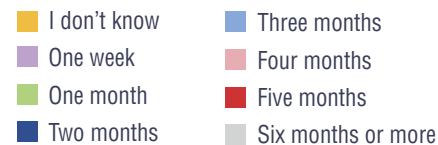
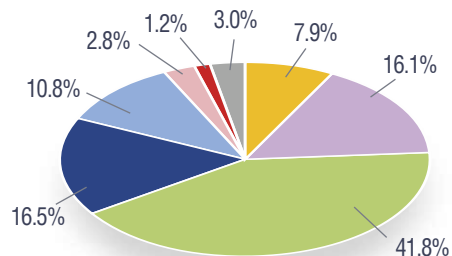
Section 5 - Booking a driving test

In question 16, we asked drivers how long they think it is reasonable for a learner driver to wait to take their practical driving test, from the time they are told they are test-ready.

Our research shows that younger drivers appear more comfortable waiting for their test than older drivers. Overall, the most popular option was one month, chosen by 42% of respondents. However, 49% of 17–19-year-olds said three months was a reasonable time to wait, while 32% of 20–22-year-olds said two months.

Data from the Department for Transport shows the current average wait time for a UK driving test is 15 weeks.²⁴ According to the AA analysis in January, there were 66 test centres across the country where those booking a test had to wait more than 24 weeks.²⁵

Q16. From the time a learner driver is told they are ready to take their practical driving test, how long do you think it is reasonable for them to wait to take their test?



24. <https://www.theaa.com/about-us/newsroom/driving-test-waits-2023>

25. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-65128359>

Case study: Jack's story

“On and off I’ve been taking lessons since July 2021. Most weeks it would be an hour a week, and I’ve probably done about 22 hours in total.

“I’ve now stopped my lessons for a bit and it’s up to me to put in for a test. I have looked at dates before on the Government website, and you can only book a test up to 24 weeks into the future. At the end of last year in my area – Hornchurch – there were no tests to book in the next six months.

“The Testi app is heavily recommended on online forums. To use it you need to pay £10 and it will find cancellations for you, but to use it you already need a test booking. So you book a test in a random place you know isn’t busy, for example Skegness. Your plan isn’t to take a test in Skegness as you don’t live there and you don’t know the roads. The app looks for a cancellation in your area and then you book it. It’s funny, as on the Government website there is no way to join a waiting list or wait for a cancellation. I was told that new test slots are uploaded onto the Government site every Monday morning, so if you’re lucky you might be able to grab one that comes up in the next few months.

“It’s such a strange way of getting a test booked. It personally put me off trying and I’m in this weird place where I haven’t taken lessons for a while and now I need to get back into it and then get the test booked. From what I can tell it hasn’t improved much. I’ve reached a point where I now need to retake my theory as they only last for two years and then you have to pay for it again.”

Jack is an identity and access management analyst at AXA UK.



There is clearly a public appetite for change when it comes to driver education, testing and lifelong learning.

From the findings of this report, we urge the Government to convene a high-level, strategic review of driver education, testing and licensing, in particular looking at ways to safeguard those who are more susceptible to being injured or killed in a road crash.

We recommend the high-level strategic review considers:

1. A progressive licensing system that provides safeguards for learner and newly qualified drivers

More than 1,500 young people are killed or seriously injured on our roads each year. 17–24-year-olds account for only 6% of all licence holders in Britain,²⁶ yet they represent 18% of all car drivers killed or seriously injured.²⁷ Young people aged 17–24 years are at greater risk than other drivers because of age and inexperience.

A progressive licensing system – which introduces elements such as hazard perception training, motorway and rural road training, while also reducing the number of similar-aged passengers a newly-licensed driver can carry – has proved successful in reducing road deaths and injuries of young drivers in other countries. For example,

a similar system in New Zealand led to a 23% reduction in car crash injuries for 15–19-year-olds, and a 12% reduction for 20–24-year-olds.

Knowing that these risks exist for young people, and knowing that there are ways to support and safeguard them, we recommend the government acts **now** to implement this type of system as a way to reduce the number of young people being killed or seriously injured on our roads.

This report shows that nearly two-thirds (63%) of drivers surveyed said they would support a phased licensing system (similar to that described as a progressive licensing system), and only one-sixth (16%) would be against it. This overwhelming majority demonstrates that there is clear public support and appetite for a system like this, and for ensuring we prioritise the safety of young drivers on our road.

2. Mandatory sight testing every two years

We welcomed the recent announcements in the press that the DVLA will be updating its guidance for drivers with eye conditions. Good vision is essential for safe driving and everyone who drives is responsible for ensuring they only do so if their vision is of the required standard.²⁸

However, the public views from this report show there is an appetite to go a step further, as 83% of

people who responded to our survey agreed that drivers should be required by law to have their vision tested regularly by an optician. Brake has long called for the introduction of mandatory sight testing for licensed drivers every two years, to ensure that any deterioration in vision that may affect driving is not left undetected, nor left to the individual to take proactive action.

3. Investment to clear the driving test backlog

Since Covid, the average waiting time for a UK driving test has increased significantly – from an average of six weeks before 2020, peaking at 24 weeks in November 2022. Data from the Department for Transport shows the current average is 15 weeks, with more than 500,000 learners waiting to take their test. We welcome the recent announcement from the DVLA to tackle the driving test backlog. Our research shows that people generally feel that one month is an appropriate time to wait when test ready. AXA UK is concerned that there are a number of drivers who are test ready and risk losing their driving skills and experience whilst they wait for a test, and therefore recommends that further investment is provided to the DVLA to increase the number of tests available for learner drivers.

26. DVLA (2023) GB Driving licence data. Table DRL0101. Provisional and Full driving licences held, by age and by gender, Great Britain

27. DfT (2022) Reported road casualties Great Britain. Annual report 2021 and associated data sets

28. <https://www.gov.uk/eye-conditions-and-driving>

4. Place signs indicating the speed limit on roads and carriageways to replace the national speed limit sign

The survey indicates many people were unsure of the default speed limits on motorways, dual carriageways, single carriageways and on roads in built-up areas. If we are spending time and mental energy on establishing the speed limit of a road, we may become distracted or begin speeding unintentionally.

We recommend local authorities replace default speed signs (such as the national speed limit sign) with red circle signs that clearly indicating the speed limit is 30 mph on roads in built-up areas.

Similarly, we recommend that the local authority or National Highways places signs which clearly state the default speed limit on single and dual carriageways.

As speed limits can be altered to alleviate traffic congestion or to manage traffic flow around an incident on the motorways, it is not recommended that the default speed limit of 70mph is clearly stated on motorways. However, we would recommend that variable message signs, specifically on smart motorways, should clearly state the speed required where possible.

30. <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/road-safety/stay-safe-stay-back/>

5. Call for more driver education and awareness around distances that should be left between vehicles and relationship between speed, stopping distances and risk of injury

Most respondents (71%) were unable to correctly determine the gap that should be left between moving vehicles. The Highway Code says you should “allow at least a two-second gap between you and the vehicle in front on roads carrying faster-moving traffic”. This is to allow the time needed for thinking and stopping to avoid a crash.

Additional awareness campaigns (such as the recent ‘Stay Safe. Stay Back’ campaign by National Highways) should be deployed to a broad demographic to improve understanding of the risk of tailgating and the relationship between speed and stopping distances.²⁹

6. Increase the funding for local authorities’ active travel budgets so more available and accessible segregated pathways can be built to enable people to walk, ride and wheel without fear of the road

While survey respondents showed a good level of knowledge about how to behave around cyclists, we know that cyclists are still very vulnerable on our roads, suggesting a level of disparity between what drivers say they know, and how they actually behave on roads.

We therefore recommend a clear statement to reinstate the previous level of active travel funding for local authorities and combined authorities to create more inclusive and accessible segregated pavements, cycle paths and roads to enable people to be active and walk, ride and wheel, in safe spaces away from motorised traffic.



About Brake, the road safety charity

Brake is a national road safety charity, founded in 1995, that exists to stop deaths, serious injuries and pollution on roads, and to care for families bereaved and injured in road crashes. Brake campaigns for safe and healthy roads through seeking government policies and investment to end the carnage, and through projects that help communities, schools and employers promote safe and pollution-free streets locally. Brake delivers Road Safety Week, the UK's biggest road safety campaign.

Brake is the national provider of care and support to victims of road crashes and their families through the **National Road Victim Service**, helping families cope with the shock, turmoil and devastation that road crashes cause families across the UK every day.

For more information and to fundraise for the charity, go to www.brake.org.uk

To find out more about partnering with Brake to support our vital work caring for bereaved and injured road victims and campaigning for zero harm roads, for everyone, email corporate@brake.org.uk or go to www.brake.org.uk/partnerships

About AXA UK

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