

RSA ROAD SAFETY AUTHORITY

GETTING UP TO SPEED WITH THE NEW LEARNER DRIVING REQUIREMENTS

The way drivers are being trained has been completely overhauled with learner drivers now being required to undertake mandatory lessons and encouraged to practice with a sponsor. Tara Leigh takes a look at everything you need to know before getting behind the wheel



With 17 to 24-year-old road users three times more likely to be killed on Irish roads than any other road user, the introduction of safeguards for this age group was inevitable. “5,678 young road users were killed or seriously injured on Irish roads in the period from 1997 to 2009,” says Noel Brett, Chief Executive of the Road Safety Authority. “This is roughly the same as the population of Westport in Co Mayo. When you think of it in those terms, we are reminded of how needless this loss of life is.”

In an effort to combat this issue the Road Safety Authority and road safety organisations around the world tried to find out what makes people safer drivers. They discovered that the way you learn to drive has a major bearing on your competency as a driver.

**TRAINING KEY DRIVER IN ROAD SAFETY**

“The modern driving environment is particularly demanding with increased volumes of traffic, more complex road networks and faster vehicles,” stated Mr Brett. “It is essential that drivers are formally trained to drive safely for life rather than trained just to pass a test.”

“I want to acknowledge the maturity and responsibility which the vast majority of young and inexperienced drivers demonstrate. However, driver inexperience is a major risk factor in death and injury collisions on our roads. The facts are that young and inexperienced drivers are more likely to kill or be killed on Irish roads.”

In developing the initiative, the Road Safety Authority studied the effectiveness of the measures internationally, carried out a detailed public consultation process and sought to introduce a programme that maximises the safety of inexperienced

drivers and those with whom they share the road. The results proved that a graduated driving licensing system leads to increased driving skills and a significant decrease in fatal accidents.

**PASSING THE TEST**

On the 1st of September 2010, the Road Safety Authority announced a range of measures, as part of their Graduated Driving Licensing system, to enhance the way those learning to drive a car and those learning to drive a motorcycle would be trained, tested and licensed in Ireland.

The first of these measures - Initial Basic Training -

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came into effect on the 6th of December 2010, with learner motorcyclists now required to undertake 16 hours of mandatory training. Four months later, Essential Driver Training was introduced. Under the Essential Driver Training programme, all those applying for their first learner permit for a car on or after the 4th of April 2011 must undertake at least 12 hours of compulsory training.

According to the Road Safety Authority the introduction of the Essential Driver Training scheme will not only help learner drivers to learn vital driving skills but also enhance their

understanding of road safety. The 12 one-hour sessions will tackle 10 specific ‘high risk’ issues to ensure drivers are fully equipped to drive safely from the very beginning of their motoring careers.

In addition to the mandatory training it is also strongly recommended that each learner driver choose a sponsor to supervise their practice time away from their instructor. Noel Brett believes these are necessary measures which will make a big difference to the death toll on Irish roads. “I make a particular plea to parents to increase their involvement in supervising their young

adults learning to drive. Whilst the mandatory lessons will not apply to existing learner permit holders I do urge all learner drivers to engage with an Approved Driving Instructor and undertake structured training.

“With the support of young people and their parents I am confident that these new measures will make a huge contribution to reducing death and injuries amongst the next generation of Irish drivers, not just now but for the duration of their driving careers.”

• For more information on Essential Driver Training log on to [rsa.ie](http://rsa.ie)



ESSENTIAL DRIVER TRAINING UNCOVERED

Applying for your first learner permit for a car? Tara Leigh talks to ADI Chief Examiner Michael Dolan and Approved Driving Instructor Tomás O'Callaghan about what is required of learner drivers today

Essential Driver Training makes the road safer for all of us.

Anyone applying for their first learner permit for a car must complete 12 hours of driving lessons with an RSA-registered Approved Driving Instructor.

It's part of the Essential Driver Training requirements, which, along with regular supervised practice and any additional lessons you might require, will put you on the right road to becoming a safer driver.

The more training you get before you get behind the wheel, the better prepared you are to make the road safer for yourself and every other road user.

Find out more about Essential Driver Training and see a list of RSA-registered Approved Driving Instructors near you at [rsa.ie](http://rsa.ie).



Today's driving landscape is completely different from what it was four or five years ago. Not only has Ireland's infrastructure changed but the vehicles we drive are different. As a result drivers are faced with far more challenges than ever before.

A man who understands this all too well is Road Safety Authority Approved Driving Instructor Tomás O'Callaghan.

“Every time one person dies in a road collision five or six are injured. Before the Essential Driver Training programme was introduced, these people would come to me looking to learn to drive safely because they have witnessed the effects of reckless driving. Essential Driver Training now makes it mandatory for learners to learn how to drive safely before an injury occurs.”

“In developing this scheme we did a lot of research and the research shows that structured learning and plenty of practice are necessary in becoming a competent driver,” affirms ADI Chief Examiner, Michael Dolan.

**LESSONS LEARNT**

The 12-lesson programme which must be undertaken with an Approved Driving Instructor focuses on specific areas that research has shown to contribute most to collision and injuries.

At your first lesson, your Approved Driving Instructor will give you a personal Logbook setting out the lesson plan for the Essential Driver Training course. As each lesson is completed,

your Approved Driving Instructor will record your progress in the Logbook. Learners keep their logbook, complete and/or review it between lessons and practice sessions, and take it along to every session.

“Self-analysis is an important aspect of Essential Driver Training as it encourages the pupil to observe and question their strengths and weaknesses, while at the same time guarding against over confidence. It is important to let the student know that this is not about self-criticism. It is about recognising the errors and advancing from there,” states O'Callaghan.

“I believe people absorb the information and adjust to it better when it is there in black and white. When some drivers make an error and it hasn't caused an accident, they are inclined to ignore it and forget about it. The self-analysis part of the training makes them ask questions such as ‘what happened? How did it happen and how can I correct it?’”

While the Logbook is an important tool in self-analysis it can also be extremely useful to the Sponsor who can check your Logbook for feedback and structure your practice time accordingly.

“It is important to recognise the role of the Sponsor as a critical one but not a new one,” states Dolan. “Traditionally when people learned to drive they went out with their mothers and fathers but there needs to be structure to that training. Through this scheme we are highlighting the need for a mix of both formal training and informal supervised practice.

“However, the Sponsor should not teach the learner new skills that have not been covered by the Approved Driving Instructor. The Sponsor's role is to reinforce the learning that is happening in the formal lessons.”

**HITTING THE BOOKS**

Plenty of training and practice is necessary to become a safer driver but according to Dolan it is just as important to utilise the learning tools available.

“Essential Driver Training is only part of the the Road Safety Authority's Learner Driver Training syllabus,” asserts Dolan. “A learner should look at the syllabus as a whole to get an idea of the level of effort required to

become a better, safer driver.”

The Rules of the Road and Driver Theory books are also great instruments for the learner driver and a good Approved Driving Instructor should draw the learner's attention to chapters that can help their progress.

“Just because the theory test is out of the way, doesn't mean that study time is finished. Learners should be constantly refreshing their knowledge,” maintains Dolan.

**LIFELONG LEARNING**

Only after all 12 lessons have been completed and Essential Driver Training records are returned to the Road Safety Authority can the learner apply for their driving test.

However, O'Callaghan warns against considering your training over once the required 12 lessons have been completed.

“In my opinion the 12 lessons are an introduction to safe driving. Once you have completed those 12 lessons you should still seek to take structured tuition and continuously improve your skills whether you have passed your test or not.

“Some people feel that once they have passed their driving test, that's it. I believe that even after a person has passed their test they should stay in contact with their Approved Driving Instructor, advancing their skills all the time.”

That being said, the amount of tuition necessary varies from person to person.

“For someone say in a rural area, 13 or 14 lessons may be satisfactory. However, for city centre driving, that figure may

double. I know plenty of drivers who have gone up to 70 or 80 hours in an effort to continuously improve their skills.”

Tomás, who also evaluates the driving skills of elderly people, feels that Essential Driver Training is not just about teaching young people the skills they will need today but the skills they will use for the rest of their lives.

“I can sit in the passenger seat during an evaluation and tell straight away whether a person has learned in a country where formal training is mandatory. In fact, I once evaluated an 88-year-old woman who had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and was struck by how good a driver she was. The skills she learned from her structured training were still very much intact.”

As Dolan says, “it is no longer just about passing the driving test. Drivers need to learn the necessary skills now which will help them become better, safer drivers for the duration of their driving life.”

• To find out more about Essential Driver Training and to see a list of Road Safety Authority registered Approved Driving Instructors near you, visit [www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie)

• The RSA will conduct a formal review of the Essential Driver Training programme in mid 2012 and will welcome comments, suggestions and general feedback from Learner Drivers, Approved Driving Instructors, Sponsors, Insurance providers, the Gardai and the general public. The RSA can be contacted at [info@rsa.ie](mailto:info@rsa.ie)