

# Driver licensing survey

2019



For the better

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For many Western Australians, having a driver's licence can be a pathway to both independence and employment. It is also a huge responsibility which novice drivers need to be adequately prepared for. Understanding the views and experiences of Western Australians in preparing for and undertaking the Practical Driving Assessment (PDA) as part of the Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) system is therefore important in of considering strategies to nurture safer drivers.

The GDL system was introduced in Western Australia (WA) in 2002 and includes the requirement for learner drivers to obtain a minimum number of hours (50) of driving practice and pass a hazard perception test before being permitted to undertake the PDA<sup>1</sup>. Reductions in the serious crash involvement of young and novice drivers in Australia are attributed in part to the implementation of such GDL programs<sup>2</sup>.

Tougher GDL requirements can also make it harder for learners to obtain a licence. Over the past decade, the proportion of applicants failing PDAs has risen approximately 13 per

cent and the high failure rate has raised some concerns<sup>3</sup>.

To better understand learning, supervising and instructing experiences preparing for and undertaking the PDA, RAC in 2019 commissioned Painted Dog Research to undertake a survey of learner and novice drivers, non-professional supervisors and professional instructors. A total of 817 responses were received from Drivers<sup>4</sup> (373), Supervisors<sup>5</sup> (368), and Professional Instructors<sup>6</sup> (76), 81 per cent of whom reside in the Perth Metropolitan Area and 19 per cent in Regional WA. Almost all respondents (80

per cent), said their main mode of transport was by car as a driver.

**! RAC supports the Australian Government's Keys 2 Drive program which offers a free 60-minute driving lesson with an accredited professional driving instructor to holders of WA learner licences and their supervisors. The lesson includes driving instruction, as well as practical advice to both supervisors and learners on the best ways to teach and practice driving skills<sup>7</sup>.**

From 2009 to 2018 in WA, the number of drivers aged 17 to 25 years who were killed or seriously injured in traffic crashes declined by around 6 per cent per year on average, a

reduction of 61 per cent when comparing 2018 to 2009<sup>8</sup>. Sadly however, those aged 17 to 25 are still over-represented in KSI crashes (although this age group only represents 12

per cent of the WA population, 19 per cent of people killed and seriously injured in traffic crashes were drivers in this age group from 2014 to 2018).



<sup>1</sup> Road Safety Commission (2019). Learner driver FAQs. <https://www.rsc.wa.gov.au/Your-Safety/People/Novice-Drivers/Learner-Driver-FAQs>.

<sup>2</sup> Scott-Parker, B., & Rune, K. (2016). Review of the graduated driver licensing programs in Australasia. *Journal of the Australasian College of Road Safety*, 27 (4), 15-22.

<sup>3</sup> Community Development and Justice Standing Committee. *Test and re-test: the driver's licence roundabout*. [https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/publications/tables/papers.nsf/displaypaper/4012563ab624959732e039f648258427001482c3/\\$file/2563.pdf](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/publications/tables/papers.nsf/displaypaper/4012563ab624959732e039f648258427001482c3/$file/2563.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of the survey, Drivers were defined as current learners, p-plate holders, and those who had obtained a licence within the last 5 years.

<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of the survey, Supervisors were defined as anyone (e.g. parent / guardian, grandparent, sibling, family friend, etc.) who is currently supervising a learner undertaking practice driving hours or has done so within the past 5 years / intends to within the next 2 years.

<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of the survey, Professional Instructors were defined as anyone who holds the relevant licence and is currently providing instruction or had done so in the past five years.

<sup>7</sup> Keys 2 Drive (2019). <https://www.keys2drive.com.au/>.

<sup>8</sup> Main Roads Western Australia (2019). Based on a comparison of statistics from baseline in 2009 to 2018.

# Learning to drive

Most Drivers had multiple people providing supervision and instruction, with parents or guardians doing the most. Although professional lessons were considered value for money, cost was considered the main barrier to undertaking practice, followed by having a busy schedule. When Drivers did find time to practice, most of their hours occurred on suburban roads, main roads and highways.

Almost half (46 per cent) of all Drivers found it moderately or extremely easy to find opportunities to practice and just 16 per cent found it moderately or extremely difficult. Male Drivers were more likely to have found it easier to do so than females (56 per cent and 43 per cent respectively saying it was moderately or extremely easy). The experiences of current and past Supervisors were similar, with 55 per cent saying they found it moderately or extremely easy to provide the necessary supervision.

For Drivers who found it difficult to practice, the greatest barriers were the cost of professional lessons (72 per cent Drivers), having a busy schedule (61 per cent Drivers), limited or no access to a car to practice in (49 per cent), and not having access to a suitable supervisor (28 per cent). Limited awareness and involvement were demonstrated for programs designed to assist learner drivers prepare. For example, around half (44 per cent) of Drivers had not heard of the Keys 2 Drive program, and for those that had, only 31 per cent said they had already used or were planning to use it, and a further 26 per cent said they had heard of it but were not

planning to use it. When Drivers were able to practice, the majority of hours occurred during daylight (42 on average), and Figure 1 demonstrates the proportion of hours that occurred on different road types.

Almost all Drivers (96 per cent) said they had at least one non-professional Supervisor and, of these, 90 per cent said that a parent or guardian undertook most of their supervision. Eighty-eight per cent of Supervisors rated their knowledge of the road rules as either good or excellent, and 83 per cent rated their ability to supervise and educate a learner driver as either good or excellent. Eighty-five per cent of Drivers agreed the road rule knowledge of their Supervisors was either good or excellent, however the majority of Professional Instructors did not agree. Sixty-three per cent of Professional Instructors rated Supervisors' ability to prepare a learner driver for the PDA as either poor or very poor and 59 per cent rated the road-rule knowledge of Supervisors as either poor or very poor.

When it came to selecting a Professional Instructor, most Drivers and Supervisors (62 per cent and 57 per cent respectively) made their choice based on personal

recommendations, rather than cost or other factors, and Drivers undertook a median ten hours of professional instruction<sup>9</sup>. The majority of Drivers (94 per cent) rated the road rule knowledge of Professional Instructors as good or excellent (aligning with the Professional Instructors' self-rating), and similarly Supervisors (68 per cent) rated the ability of Professional Instructors to adequately prepare a learner for the PDA as either good or excellent. Both Drivers and Supervisors (73 per cent and 77 per cent respectively) rated the professional driving lessons they had paid for as being good or excellent value for money. However, more than one in three Drivers (36 per cent) said they had more than one professional instructor, and of these, around half (47 per cent) said there was a great deal of difference in the quality of instruction provided.

Drivers and Professional Instructors had differing views about which driving skills were the most difficult for learners to master (Figure 2). For Drivers, parallel parking was viewed as the hardest task, followed by driving near pedestrians, cyclists and / or motorcyclists.



<sup>9</sup> Excludes those drivers who said they hadn't had any professional instruction at the time of the survey.

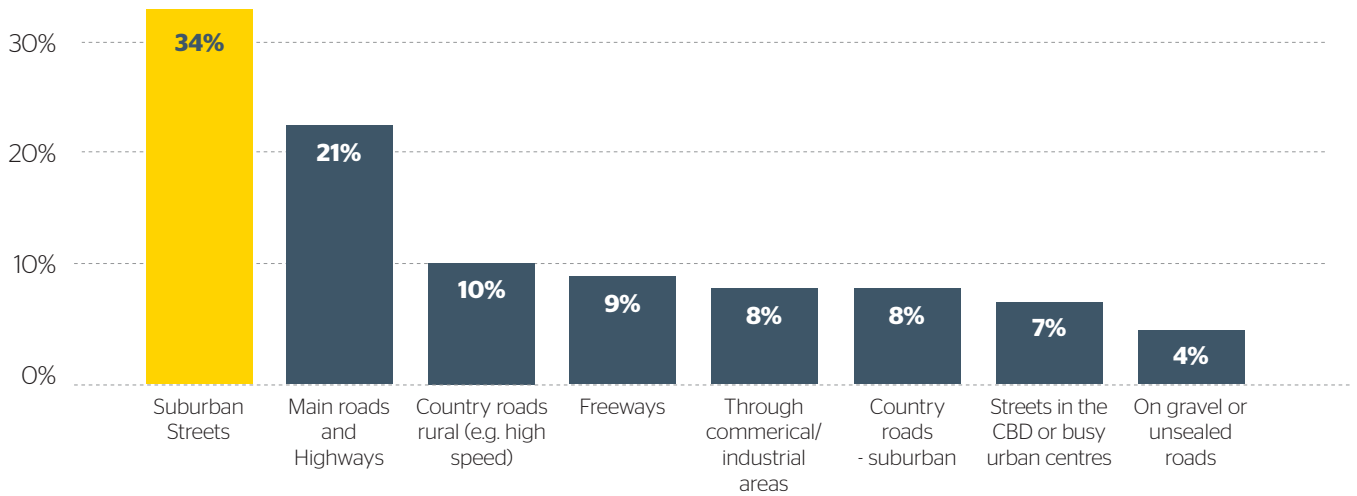


Figure 1 » Proportion of practice hours spent on various road types<sup>10</sup>

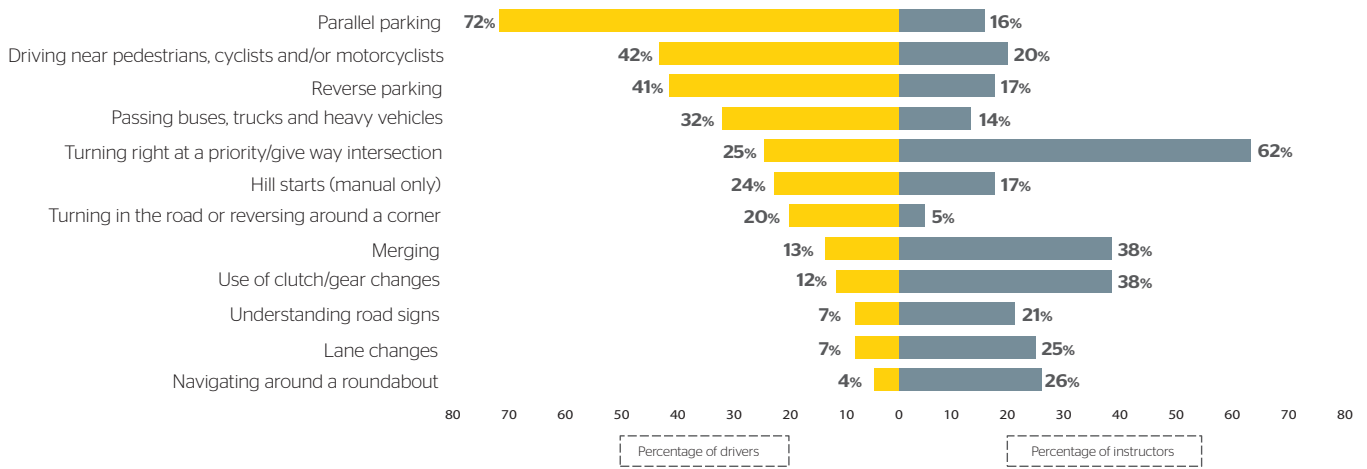


Figure 2 » Driver vs Professional Instructor ratings of the top three most difficult driving tasks to master

<sup>10</sup> Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

# Taking the practical driving assessment

When it came to the PDA, those who had more driving experience prior to taking the test were the most likely to pass it on the first attempt. Drivers appeared to appreciate the importance of practice, and around one in three said they deliberately delayed attempting their PDA for several reasons.

Almost a third of Drivers (31 per cent) said they deliberately delayed going for their licence because they were nervous about the assessment (57 per cent), did not feel ready (45 per cent), wanted to have as much practice as possible (33 per cent) or because they didn't feel there was an immediate need to do so (32 per cent). Once they felt they were ready to take it, around one in five (22 per cent) said they were able to book an assessment date within two weeks, 28 per cent reported waiting between two and four weeks, and 25 per cent between one and two months. One in ten Drivers reported waiting between two and four months and five per cent four to six months.

Although most Drivers who attempted a PDA said the driving tasks in the assessment were what they expected (78

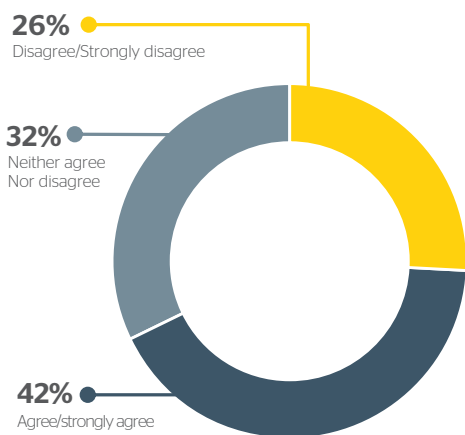
per cent), 42 per cent said that the level of difficulty was harder than they had anticipated. Around half (47 per cent) said they had attempted the PDA more than once<sup>11</sup>, with the majority of these (83 per cent) attributing failed assessments to nerves. Only half of all Drivers surveyed (51 per cent) said they felt very or extremely well-prepared to take the test. Those who had completed more than 50 hours of practice prior to undertaking their first PDA were significantly more likely report feeling very or extremely well-prepared and were also more likely to have passed the test on their first attempt.

**! One in seven Drivers (15 per cent) admitted to falsifying their log book by on average 17 per cent of the hours they claimed to have practiced driving.**

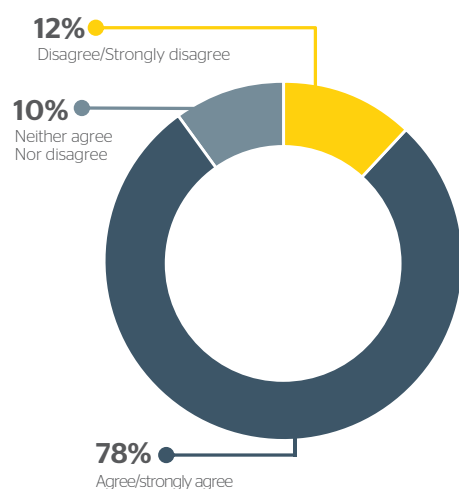
Around half of Professional Instructors (55 per cent) felt that learners were taking more attempts to pass the PDA now than they did five years ago and on average, and that three in five (61 per cent) learners undertake their PDA before they are ready. When asked why they thought this might be the case, Professional Instructors nominated a range of reasons, including pressure from family (34 per cent), for financial reasons (25 per cent) and pressure from friends (16 per cent).

On average the more PDAs a Driver attempted, the more testing centres they took their PDAs at<sup>12</sup>.

**Difficulty level was more than I expected**



**The driving tasks were as I expected**



**Figure 3 » Drivers' experiences with the PDA**

<sup>11</sup> This excludes the 16 per cent of current learners who had attempted the PDA once and failed, but hadn't yet taken a second test.

<sup>12</sup> The testing centres Drivers reported passing first time at also correlates with actual pass rates - Legislative Assembly Western Australia (2019). Report 6. Test and re-test: the driver's license roundabout. Community Development and Justice Standing Committee. [http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/commit.nsf/\(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID\)/25EA27C649D00DCB48258425002A9B8A/\\$file/42776335.pdf](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/commit.nsf/(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID)/25EA27C649D00DCB48258425002A9B8A/$file/42776335.pdf)



## Moving forward

Most consider the current GDL process to be effective in terms of creating safer drivers and opinion is mixed regarding improvements that could be made. Drivers and Supervisors considered introducing mandatory log book hours for driving in different weather conditions to be the top priority for enhancement, whereas for Professional Instructors it was introducing a mandatory number of practice hours with a Professional Instructor.

Thirty-five percent of respondents considered the current GDL process to be either very or extremely effective in creating safe drivers, and a further 48 per cent considered it moderately effective. Professional Instructors were the most critical, with the majority (67 per cent) considering the process moderately effective. When prompted with a list of potential changes (Figure 4), the top three most frequently nominated by Professional Instructors were introducing the requirement for a minimum number of hours of professional instruction (72 per cent), introducing mandatory refresher training for Supervisors (30 per cent), and increasing the total log book hours before learners are able to sit the PDA (26 per cent). Drivers and Supervisors' top three changes were mandatory log book hours in different weather conditions (40 and 37 per cent respectively), followed by a requirement for a minimum number of hours of professional instruction (34 and 33 per cent), and increased mandatory log book hours at night time (26 and 23 per cent).

Drivers and Supervisors were a lot less likely to rank the introduction of

mandatory refresher training for Supervisors in their top three changes (16 and 12 per cent respectively) than Professional Instructors were. Three in four Supervisors who were yet to instruct a learner driver did however say they intended to refresh their knowledge of the road rules prior to providing supervision (just over half, 52 per cent, of current or past Supervisors said they had done so).

Based on the prompted list, Professional Instructors were also significantly more supportive (26 per cent) than either Drivers (13 per cent) or Supervisors (12 per cent) of increasing the overall number of mandatory supervised driving hours before taking the PDA. Despite this, when respondents were asked directly to indicate how many hours of driving practice should be mandatory for learners before they are permitted to undertake a PDA in WA<sup>13</sup>, half thought it should be greater than the current requirement of 50 hours, and on average, the number of hours nominated was 71.

*"I think the minimum hours required for the driving test is just that, minimum, and some learners require additional hours to be competent. This learner was keen to get their licence, but I don't believe they were ready yet and not passing proved that" – Supervisor*

Although the quality of professional instruction appears to be high, many Drivers said that their Professional Instructor had not discussed important safety issues such as regional driving (72 per cent), drink and drug driving (75 per cent), or driver fatigue (65 per cent). Around one in three Drivers also said their Professional Instructor had not taught them how to safely interact with vulnerable road users such as pedestrians (35 per cent said not at all or a little), cyclists (40 per cent), or motorcyclists (45 per cent), and with 27 per cent of Drivers having also said they were not confident passing cyclists<sup>14</sup>, this may be an area that warrants greater attention from both Professional Instructors and Supervisors. Twelve per cent of Drivers claimed their Professional Instructor did not talk to them about road safety issues at all.



<sup>13</sup> Respondents were prompted with a table showing the number of mandatory hours in each Australian jurisdiction.

<sup>14</sup> Following the introduction of the Safe Passing Distance law in 2017, you must allow 1m when passing cyclists on roads with a speed limit of 60km/h or less, and 1.5m on roads above that speed.



**Figure 4 » Respondents' priorities for enhancements to the current GDL system to create safer drivers (ranked in top three)<sup>15</sup>**

<sup>15</sup> \*Indicate statistically significant differences between groups.

For further information  
please contact [advocacy@rac.com.au](mailto:advocacy@rac.com.au)

