

**“You’re so used to having someone tell you what to do”.
Experiences of young drivers during the Provisional licence
phase**

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Why do this research?

In many respects young drivers are the experts in being a young driver. Therefore, we can go to the young driver for their perspectives around transitioning from being a learner driver, where you have someone sitting beside you and able to help you out during every trip, to passing your driving test and you are suddenly driving by yourself with your own eyeballs, two ears and one brain regulating all of your road behaviour.

What did we do?

34 drivers aged 17 and 18 years who had already transitioned from their learner licence to their provisional licence sat and chatted about their experiences.

What did we find?

Overall, the conversation related to two factors. Factor one related to their independence as a young person. Independence from parents was great, with young people saying, ‘I don’t have to come home from school straight away’. However, this independence is complicated, as being involved with parents helped the young driver feel like they were safe. All of a sudden they had no one telling them what to do which was reported to be really scary for some young drivers. As an adolescent, developing and refining your identity is an important outcome of this lifetime stage, and the car played a key role in that progression. For example, transportation independence meant that they could drive where and when they wanted, and they didn’t have as many restrictions as if Mum and Dad were seated beside them.

The second focus of the discussion was around driving logistics. Learner drivers in Queensland have to hold their licence for a minimum of 1 year. The learner theory test was undertaken *before* they received their learner licence, so some young drivers found it really challenging to remember what road rules were, potentially from 13 months ago to as many as 2 or 3 years ago. They remember being given some resources to look at when they passed their driving test, but none of them had actually read these resources. They knew there were resources available online too, but often they went to their friends to say ‘hey, what’s this driving rule?’ Potentially this is a way that incorrect knowledge influences young driver behaviour. Some young drivers also reported that interacting with other drivers on the road was quite scary because as a learner driver they hadn’t interacted with these vehicles (e.g., trucks on a highway or buses in a city area).

What does it mean?

Generally graduated driver licencing has resulted in improvements in the road safety of young drivers. The greatest gains for graduated driver licencing, however, could be gleaned through young drivers having a more structured approach to the learner licence phase and a supported and smoother transition to their provisional licence phase. For example, during the learner phase, supervisors and parents should ensure the young person, as much as possible, gets exposure to a range of road users and a range of road environments. Once they pass their driving test, parents can stay involved in their young driver's driving by travelling with them, as either a passenger in the front seat or the back seat, with parents able to help them out if the young driver is going to be in circumstances in which they haven't previously driven.