RESPONSE TO THE
DRIVING STANDARDS AGENCY (DSA)

DISCUSSION PAPER

“INTRODUCING HAZARD PERCEPTION TESTING INTO THE
DRIVING THEORY TEST”
GENERAL COMMENTS

This is the response of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) to the Driving Standards Agency’s consultation, “Introducing Hazard Perception Testing Into The Driving Theory Test”.

It has been prepared following consultation with RoSPA’s National Road Safety Committee and its Road Safety Advisory Group, and also draws on RoSPA’s extensive experience in delivering driver training.

RoSPA welcomes and strongly supports the proposals in the discussion document and congratulates the DSA on their comprehensive nature.

Research shows that new drivers are poor at hazard perception, but that appropriate training can improve their abilities to identify and anticipate potential hazards. RoSPA has long sought the introduction of such a test and is very pleased that the Government intends to do so.

One of the most effective ways of ensuring that people undertake hazard perception training as they learn to drive is to introduce a test within the Driving Test. The success of the Hazard Perception Test will largely depend on the effectiveness of the hazard perception training it encourages. Therefore, the training strategy and resources for ADIs and others will play a crucial role. Those training learner drivers will need to be able to effectively deliver improved training to help learners develop their hazard perception skills.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

How candidates will take HPT (paragraphs 9-11)

RoSPA agrees that a short familiarisation session before candidates take the Hazard Perception Test is essential. The Hazard Perception Test is introducing a different format and requires different skills to the theory test. Candidates will have different levels of IT skills and experience of using computers, and there may be some candidates who will never have used a computer and mouse. It is important to ensure that all candidates will be able to acclimatise themselves with the computer equipment.

It is also important that the bank of hazard clips is sufficiently large and varied, and RoSPA supports the suggestion that the bank of clips be refreshed annually. It is important that all the clips used are scientifically based and are proven predictors of accidents involving novice drivers.

RoSPA agrees that the DSA should consult widely to ensure that the needs of motoring, freight, passenger transport and motorcycling sectors are considered as the Theory Test, including the Hazard Perception Test, is developed. This consultation should also include pedestrian, cycling and horse riding organisations to ensure that the HPT also reflects the needs of these vulnerable road users. However, new clips should not be introduced solely on the basis of lobbying from particular groups, but on the basis that the situations depicted are common types of accidents for novice drivers.
Implications for the rest of the theory test (paragraphs 13-14)

RoSPA supports the plan to review the balance between the HPT and the remainder of the theory test. The HPT could be viewed by candidates as less important than the multiple choice section because less time is allocated to it, and it should be clear that will be required to pass both parts to minimise the possibility of such views being adopted.

Marking arrangements for HPT (paragraph 15)

The Hazard Perception Test is not as straightforward as the current multiple choice touch-screen theory tests, and may, therefore, be perceived as more complicated by candidates. It is vital that the marking arrangements are absolutely transparent and candidates are fully informed about how the pass mark was established and what they need to do to successfully complete the HPT.

Marking arrangements for the overall theory test (paragraph 16)

RoSPA agrees that the HPT and the multiple-choice sections of the Theory Test should be separately marked. It is vital that candidates are required to pass both the sections and that unacceptably low competence in one part cannot be ‘compensated’ for by achieving a high mark in the other one.

RoSPA also supports the proposal that candidates who have failed the theory test, irrespective of whether they passed the multiple choice test or the HPT, must re-take the entire theory test again.

It is important that candidates receive feedback on the entire theory test.

Theory test for lorry and bus drivers (paragraph 17)

RoSPA believes that a higher level of competence should be required for professional lorry and bus drivers who are seeking a vocational licence. It is important that the Hazard Perception Test for lorry and bus drivers is particularly relevant to those vehicles. For example, cyclists are at greater risk from lorries and buses, particularly when those vehicles are turning left, as they can be hidden in the driver’s blind spot. The HPT film clips for these vehicles should, therefore, include hazards that reflect these situations.

Qualifying Examination to join the statutory register of Approved Driving Instructors (ADIs) (paragraphs 20-21)

These requirements are fundamental to the success of the Hazard Perception Test. ADIs must be able to provide good quality hazard perception training. Obviously, professional driving instructors must have higher levels of hazard awareness, and should be required to demonstrate a higher level of competence in the qualifying examination to join the statutory register of ADIs. In addition to ensuring that ADIs,
and those applying to be an ADIs, have very good hazard perception skills, they must be able to train their pupils in these skills.
Test of continuing ability to instruct (paragraph 22)

RoSPA believes that the Hazard Perception Test should certainly be part of the ADI check-tests to ensure their continuing ability to provide high quality hazard perception training.

Qualifying examination for LGV Register (paragraph 23)

RoSPA believes that a Hazard Perception Test should become an integral part of the qualifying examination to join the register of Large Goods Vehicle driving instructors and of any other Registers which may be introduced by the DSA.

Training Strategy (paragraphs 24-33)

An effective training support strategy will be crucial to ensure the Hazard Perception Test achieves its aims of improving novice driver safety and reducing casualties. RoSPA wholly endorses the plans outlined in paragraphs 24 to 27.

We agree that the actual film clips should not be published as this would enable candidates to rehearse until they achieved good speeds at clicking on the hazards. Publishing example film clips is a better option. These should be made available as soon as possible to ensure that instructors and learners have plenty of time to develop their training to include the Hazard Perception Test.

The training materials should be suitable for individual and group use, and developed with the continuing help of the driver and rider training industry. Will ADIs operating on their own have the necessary equipment and facilities to provide training? We are concerned that the full training package will not be trialled until next year; surely this should be available in advance of the test’s introduction.

The provision of training resources on their own may not be sufficient. DSA should also consider how it can provide training for ADIs in these new techniques, as not all ADIs may be able to deliver this new training effectively.

Local Authority Road Safety Officers and organisations that run driver improvement courses and fleet driver training will also be interested in the material developed to teach hazard perception. It would be very helpful if these groups received the training materials in advance to enable them to begin to prepare the young drivers with whom they deal.

It is essential that the introduction of the Hazard Perception Test is preceded by good publicity and information. A comprehensive and extensive publicity campaign should be launched well in advance of the implementation date. RoSPA believes that it is important for all road users to be well informed about the changes, which are the most significant made since the introduction of the theory test.

The Hazard Perception Test should also be included in extended re-tests, so that drivers who are disqualified and ordered to take a re-test at the end of their disqualification period, are required to pass the HPT. New Drivers who are required to take a driving test again (because they acquired six or more penalty points) should also have to take the HPT.
Implementation Date (paragraph 34)

RoSPA supports the October 2002 introduction date, but it is essential that the HPT will work reliably from its introduction. Hopefully, the film clips, IT equipment and administrative arrangements will all be in place. If not, it would be better to slightly delay the introduction than to introduce it before it is certain that it will work reliably.

Disclosure of Responses

RoSPA thanks DSA for the opportunity to comment on this discussion paper. We have no objection to our response being published and for the content to be made available to anyone requesting copies of individual responses.