



LDSP
Ireland CLG



Learner Driver Support Programme

Creating a safer environment for learner drivers in Ireland by providing support to help learners achieve their recommended 36 hours supervised driving practice.

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Introduction

The key objective is to improve the safety of learner drivers and provide a safe driving environment in which learners can practice safe driving skills. In primary research undertaken by the author in 2018, 31% of Advanced Driving Instructors (ADIs) surveyed were of the opinion that EDT did not provide a safe driving environment for learner drivers¹. As part of the Road Safety Strategy 2030 to reduce road fatalities by half, and Vision Zero 2050, the support and mentoring of learner drivers will play a vital role in achieving these objectives.

Social Problem

Currently there is no support programme in Ireland for learner drivers. Drawing on the experience and success of the Learner Driver Mentor Programme (LDMP) in New Zealand and Australia, and adapting it to the Irish environment would have great benefit for learner drivers in Ireland. LDMPs have an important role in facilitating young learner drivers to acquire the appropriate number of sponsor hours of driving practice.² Learner drivers in Ireland are recommended to undertake 36 hours of accompanied driving along with EDT programme. Although it is illegal, driving unaccompanied is regularly done by a large percentage of learner drivers. In 2012 43% of learner permit holders drove unaccompanied according to the Garda Síochána (Operation learner driver).

The biggest obstacle facing this programme is the culture in Ireland. Although it is illegal, driving unaccompanied is regularly done by a large percentage of learner drivers. There is very much a blasé attitude with learners to driving unaccompanied as highlighted by Moyagh Murdoch (former CEO RSA) confirming that Ireland has a “*culture of turning a blind eye on unaccompanied drivers*”. In 2022, 5,929 learner drivers received penalty points for driving unaccompanied

From primary research it also became apparent that learner drivers experience undue difficulty in securing sponsors to assist them in obtaining the recommended 36 hours of accompanied driving. Without support, we have and will continue to have an unacceptable situation of learners driving unaccompanied and being involved in serious and fatal road collisions.

Between 2013-2021, unaccompanied learner drivers were involved in 376 KSI (Killed or Seriously Injured) collisions; accompanied learners were 65% less likely to be involved in collision at 132 KSI collisions.

¹ C Jordan, *An Evaluation of the Learner Driving Process in Ireland (Category B)*, 2018 (refer Appendix C for primary research finding)

² Bates, L., Buckley L., Soole D., (2015) *Learner Driver Mentor Programs: Stakeholder perspectives on an Ideal Program*, Research Gate, October 2015, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289131257_Learner_Driver_Mentor_Programs_Stakeholder_perspectives_on_an_ideal_program

Table 1, Collisions involving a learner driver of private car or van, 2013-2021

| | Collision Type | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------|---------|-------|
| Number of collisions involving: | Fatal | Serious | Minor |
| Learner accompanied | 17 | 115 | 656 |
| Learner unaccompanied | 55 | 321 | 2145 |

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

Collisions may have involved more than one learner driver

Source: Road Safety Authority (2023)

Social Impact

The Learner Driver Support Programme (LDSP) is designed to assist learner drivers in accessing a sponsor and vehicle so they can gain the 36 hours sponsor practice recommended during completion of the Essential Driver Training (EDT) process. Having a driver's licence can enhance:

- Employment opportunities
- Access to education/employment opportunities
- Access to social, community and sporting activities
- Access to medical/health facilities and other services, particularly in rural or regional areas
- Independent living skills

What does the Learner Driver Support Programme Do?

A car will be provided for the programme with dual controls and relevant tax, insurance and roadworthiness checks. Garda vetted volunteers aged over 25 with a full driving licence over 2 years will receive 8 hours training in how to supervise and support a learner driver. Young adults between 17-24 years of age who do not have access to a car or financial means will be vetted to assess if they meet criteria to enter the programme.

When a learner enters the programme, they will be given details on how to apply for €250 Training Support Grant scheme which will enable them to undertake 6 driving lessons with an Approved Driving Instructor. On completion of these driving lessons and with consultation with a driving instructor the learner is matched up with a suitable volunteer who will provide 90 minutes of supervised driving with the learner per week until they are at a suitable safe and independent driving standard. This supervised driving practice will take place in the car provided by the Learner Driver Support Programme.

Funding will be sought for completion of remaining mandatory Essential Driver Training lessons and provision of vehicle for the driving test.

Who Are We?

There are currently two directors of this programme, Aidan Jordan and Clíodhna Jordan MSc MBA FCII. Aidan Jordan has been a driving instructor since 1996, and regularly encounters learner drivers who are unable to complete their life ambition of gaining a full driving licence, due to family circumstances and/or financial constraints.

Clíodhna Jordan holds an MSc in Management of Operations in 2018 (First Class) DCU - Dissertation title *"An Evaluation of the Learner Driving Process in Ireland (Category B)"* Continued research with analysis of 42 countries internationally, seeking to break down step-by-step their learning to drive education practices to comparing/contrasting these programmes to those in Ireland. Two policy papers produced *"Driver Theory Training and Education Ireland"* and *"A preliminary comparison of learner drivers' education in Ireland with other international regions, and the future direction of driver education and safety"*.

Conclusion

Driving provides a terrific sense of freedom, but it's also potentially the most dangerous action we do daily. Learning to drive isn't just about passing a test – it's about learning skills from experience and continually improving and advancing the quality of those skills. This programme has the potential to reduce learner and novice driver accident rates through supporting learner drivers achieve sponsor hours in a safe environment.

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