



Joint Submission to the Transport Select Committee from the Optical Confederation and the Eye Health Alliance

Our views are supported by Brake, the road safety charity and



EU Directive on Driving Licences 2006

We would like the committee to examine the progress on implementation of the EU Directive on Driving Licences. In particular, we are very concerned that the UK is not taking sufficient steps to appropriately implement the eyesight requirements for drivers and is lagging behind other European countries in implementing the Directive, as amended in 2009. We strongly believe that the UK's number plate test and the heavy reliance on Group 1 drivers to self-report visual problems to the DVLA, fall short of meeting the Directive requirements. Improving the way we assess and advise drivers about their eyesight in the UK, is long overdue and is unnecessarily putting drivers and other road users at risk.

Other European countries take a much more systematic and standardised approach and require drivers to have an additional assessment later in their driving career. The Republic of Ireland and Finland require drivers to undergo vision screening for visual acuity (distance vision) and visual fields (peripheral or side vision) performed by a medical doctor or optometrist. In Ireland this has recently been extended to cover twilight vision, glare and contrast sensitivity.

What the Directive specifies:

The eyesight requirements for drivers are contained in Directive 2006/126/EC, updated by Directive 2009/113/EC. It states that "all applicants for a driving licence shall undergo an appropriate investigation to ensure that they have adequate visual acuity for driving power-driven vehicles. Where there is reason to doubt that the applicant's vision is adequate, he shall be examined by a competent medical authority." (Annex III 6.0)

For further information about the European legislation please see the recent article in Optician:
<http://www.opticianonline.net/Articles/2010/11/19/26719/Driving+and+vision.html>

Case studies

The Guardian recently highlighted a study about difficulties for healthcare professionals when advising patients about fitness to drive and the problems of relying on drivers to self-report medical conditions or impaired vision to the DVLA. The article also highlighted a number of case studies where people had been killed by drivers with poor vision.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/dec/26/unfit-drivers-report-health?INTCMP=SRCH>

How the UK system should be improved:

Firstly all drivers should have an adequate assessment of their visual acuity using a Snellen chart – (the letter chart which measures visual acuity) by a competent medical authority who can also provide advice on eye care issues. This would provide a more standardised assessment that can be repeated and overcomes the problem of inconsistent environmental conditions. Secondly, there needs to be a more frequent mandatory assessment of drivers' vision, rather than placing all the responsibility on the driver. This should take place every ten years when a driver renews their licence, and for drivers over 45, this assessment should also include checking visual fields. (This is already required for vocational drivers, although renewal takes place every five years.) For more information on how drivers' vision should be screened please see the article in Optician;

<http://www.opticianonline.net/Articles/2011/01/21/26987/Driving+and+vision+-+part+3.html>

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