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WELLINGTON

Dear Sir/Madam

## THE NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM: CONSULTATION 2006

### Introduction

The New Zealand Automobile Association (AA) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the discussion New Zealand Curriculum document.

As an organisation representing over 1 million vehicle owners and drivers in New Zealand, we address proposals that may impact upon the use of motor vehicles. Learning to drive is a key competency that facilitates full participation in New Zealand life and culture, almost to the same extent as basic literacy and numeracy. As such, our submission focuses on the need to educate young people to be safe, skilled, environmentally conscious and considerate road users, and also on the road safety for all transport users.

### Key message

The AA considers that the draft Curriculum, while enabling driver education to a greater extent than the current curriculum, does not adequately recognise driving as a key competency nor adequately facilitate its uptake. Learning to drive is an almost universal requirement for modern life; in addition, driving is also one of the single greatest risks faced by young people.

The AA considers it imperative that driver education and road safety be core requirements of the NZ Secondary School Curriculum, accessible to all New Zealanders on an equal footing and to an equal standard across the country.

The AA further submits that driving should be made compulsory in the school curriculum. Many schools have some form of driver education, but at a very low profile. Unless it is compulsory, few schools will overcome historical inertia to give driver education a high priority. Teaching students to drive safely is not generally part of the skill set of current teaching staff and nor is it top of mind for Boards of Trustees and school principals – that is, there is no reason to believe a nationwide programme will arise spontaneously without direction from national agencies.

### The draft Curriculum does not recognise driving as a key competency

We found it extremely difficult to comment on where learning to drive should sit in the framework of the draft Curriculum, which was clearly written without considering driving as a priority for learning. Despite its radical break from the existing approach to the curriculum, the draft still seems grounded in a cerebral approach to learning, aimed at accommodating easily the traditional academic areas, while giving lesser status or emphasis to practical, skill-oriented learning styles and content which could arguably be even more important for many groups.

In particular there appears to be a 'blind spot' where driver education is concerned, which is not explicitly mentioned anywhere in the draft Curriculum. The ability to drive, to transport yourself to all destinations you need to go without depending on others, is a critical success factor for the vast majority of students throughout their lives, but is not mentioned in the key values or principles.

A determined teacher could easily work within the draft framework to accommodate learning to drive, and this is to be welcomed. Learning to drive could possibly sit as an "add-on", perhaps optionally included in the Technology or Health and Physical Education learning areas. Since most current driver education is competency based, it fits all the components of NCEA and is very easy to integrate into the core curriculum. Nevertheless, we predict that the obscurity of driving in the draft Curriculum predetermines a poor uptake of driver education for the future. The AA contends that this is a substantial flaw in the draft document.

The ability to drive is, and will continue to be, hugely important in modern life determining students' social and economic outcomes long into the future. We outline below some key statistics to support this contention.

- Driving is a crucial life skill needed by almost all of our population, at a similar level to such academic skills as reading, writing and arithmetic: of New Zealanders aged 34-39, nearly 100% of males and 96% of females have driven a car<sup>1</sup>
- A large body of scientific literature shows that access to a car is strongly associated with socioeconomic measures such as employment, income and moving off of welfare; and also with health and social wellbeing indicators
- Access to individual mobility provides a key to entry to the workforce, which separates the haves and the have nots – it enables a much wider range of employment opportunities.
- In the 15-19 age group (of interest to secondary schools) transport accidents account for 50% of externally caused deaths, with suicide second (31%)<sup>2</sup>. Road traffic deaths are one of the major causes of loss of life years, because such young lives are cut short. Road injury is a major health epidemic, and society as a whole needs to stop taking this level of death and injury for granted. Last year 83 young drivers died and 2457 were injured. 15-19 year old drivers are seven times more likely than a 35-39 year old to crash for each kilometre driven.<sup>3</sup>
- Teaching motorists to drive more efficiently is the single most cost-effective measure to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions as assessed of all measures taken by OECD countries in a report to European Ministers of Transport<sup>4</sup>
- Young drivers pose an accident risk to others when they are allowed to drive alone on the roads without adequate training, practice and education on best practice.

Driving contributes to a student's economic advantage, interpersonal skills, transport access, safety management, personal identity, positive attitude and understanding of science and technology. Through teaching driving, teachers can weave in strands such as identity, sensitivity and respect for others, societal attitudes and values, rights and responsibilities. Teaching to drive fuel efficiently contributes to caring for our environment. Driving thus meets many of the goals of the curriculum and fits within the proposed framework.

The AA submits that the draft curriculum should make this match explicit, both by directly referring to it as a key competency and by making driving, if not road safety, training compulsory for all.

<sup>1</sup> Household Travel Survey 2003-2004, Ministry of Transport

<sup>2</sup> NZ Health Information Service statistics, 2003

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Transport Young Driver statistics 2006

<sup>4</sup> Review of CO<sub>2</sub> Abatement Policies for the Transport Sector Jan 2006 CEMT/CS/ENV(2006)1

### **Driving and road safety should be made compulsory in the Curriculum**

The draft Curriculum makes a bold move away from a prescriptive curriculum to allow greater flexibility; moving from inputs to outputs. This recognises that students are individuals and need educational choices that allow them to reach their unique aspirations. We recognise that this flexibility allows schools to choose a direction appropriate to their local needs. Also, because the draft Curriculum creatively extends beyond the traditional subjects, it does allow for driver education more than previously. The AA considers this a positive step.

The Curriculum must take a middle path between flexibility and prescriptiveness, and achieve a balance. But in our view the draft Curriculum takes flexibility too far. Students live today in the global village, and to reach their potential in modern society, they need to reach a minimum standard in very specific key competencies, which we refer to here as universal skills. For example, without basic literacy and numeracy, a student's chance of achieving their potential in modern society is severely compromised. We believe driving is one of this small set of key skills.

These universal skills need to be taught across the country, irrespective of the preferences of the individual school or enthusiasms of individual teachers. They should be compulsory, not optional, with a consistent set of basic national requirements. By defining the key competencies and principles so broadly, with such wide interpretations, the draft Curriculum fails New Zealand students.

Schools are historically geared to deliver literacy and numeracy – there is little risk that an overly flexible curriculum would erode them. Teachers and schools have the pre-existing skill sets and systems to deliver numeracy and literacy. In contrast, few incumbent teachers have the skills, background or interest in driving to introduce it as a new subject. Incumbent teachers lack familiarity with the driving unit standards and other resources. Schools do not have the facilities or back-up to deliver practical driver training. Our concern is that driving is a universal skill that has never been consistently delivered within the traditional curriculum. Given the lack of history or profile of driver education in schools, driving needs to be given more, rather than less, emphasis than the historically delivered universal subjects.

In summary the draft Curriculum simply enables, but does not provide a practical route, whereby driving can be introduced. We conclude that the laissez faire approach of the draft curriculum is almost guaranteed to ensure that driver education and road safety will not be uniformly delivered to a common standard across the whole country. Driver education will depend on the interest and enthusiasm of individual teachers and develop piecemeal if at all. This will short-change our students. Only a concerted nationwide push can effect a nationwide improvement in our young driver ability and survival rates.

The AA is not talking about a tweak here and there to the draft curriculum document, but a fundamental shift in the paradigm. All schools should be required to have a Driving Education Plan, including road safety. The Curriculum cannot treat driving as an obscure educational option: it has a significant impact on students' income potential and employability; addresses one of the greatest safety risks they face; affects self esteem, independence and social cohesion; enables participation in cultural and sporting activities and contributes to supporting their family's needs.

### **What is the alternative?**

If driving is not delivered consistently through the school system to all students, it relies on the 'hit and miss' resources, skill, interest and ability (or lack thereof) of individual parents or

whanau. Many will continue to learn 'on the road' alone, without good driving role models, placing themselves and others at risk.

An AA focus group of 36 young drivers showed that one in five are driving alone with less than half a dozen hours of supervised practice. The luxury of receiving best practice, 120 hours of parental supervision on the road prior to solo driving, is available only to those privileged to have dedicated parents, generally the comfortable middle classes. The very groups that are not receiving adequate driver education are those most at risk on a range of social indicators as well as from a road safety perspective. Such a universal skill as driving should not be left to the goodwill of an individual's parents.

Further, having the ability to drive and thus be independent reliant solely on parents, it perpetuates the "haves" and the "have nots". It reinforces a cycle where students' aspirations to participate and achieve are limited by their existing poorer environment, which they cannot escape through their own efforts.

The AA contends that the only way for all novice drivers to receive the same high standard of education prior to driving alone, and to even out the inequalities within society, is to deliver it through the secondary school system. The AA can say this in its role both as one of the leading providers of private driver training and education, and one of the agencies most interested in young driver safety. We strongly submit that all schools be required to make driver education compulsory across the country (indeed, it is particularly important in the more remote or disadvantaged areas).

### **Space in the Curriculum**

Clearly there are many groups that urge non-academic life skills into an already crowded curriculum. It is the AA's contention that while many issues are important, such as drugs, pregnancy, or failing at school, may not in reality be as deadly as young driver crashes. Driving is one of the greatest risks facing these young people and the consequences are irreversible; there is nothing that can be done to bring back a young life. The AA considers that it is a failure of a duty of care that the vast majority of our young people receive no formal driver education whatsoever prior to their highest risk period – the first six months of solo driving.

The need to be able to drive is far higher than that of many other subjects in the curriculum. The argument about space is not relevant when on both a risk and potential basis the arguments for inclusion are so strong.

### **What Driver Education is Needed?**

The AA's criticisms are not directed at the Curriculum. The blind spot towards driver education is societal. The problem of road crashes is avoided for several reasons:

1. People find it difficult to contemplate such terrible outcomes
2. Driving is overly familiar, an everyday event taken for granted
3. It is human nature to assume 'It won't happen to me/my child'
4. A sense of powerlessness (we have no control, it is an unavoidable risk)

It can and does happen – there is a higher chance of being killed on the road than winning Lotto – and yet a lot of people buy Lotto tickets. And we are not powerless. In fact, teen driver risk is real, large and preventable. Risk can be dramatically lowered through education, and the means is simple and affordable, such as increased practice. The barrier is lack of information about the steps that can be taken and relative risks and how to manage them. There are social misperceptions about driving and education is the key to improving the outcomes. The education system is the missing link.

**Attitude**

The most important driving skill is not mechanics (knowing the road rules and how to change gear) but judgement: making mature choices about when and when not to drive, being patient and considerate with other road users, and taking personal responsibility. Many teens learn good attitudes from watching and being supervised by a mature driver while they are learning. But what happens to the teens that do not have a good role model available?

**Hazards and Risks**

Experienced drivers look well down the road and anticipate hazards. Novice drivers look directly in front of the bonnet, too close to respond. Training in eye scanning and in hazard detection should occur before solo driving. All drivers need to be taught the risks and how to manage them – for example, how speed affects stopping distance and the relative risk at night versus daytime.

**Experience**

Clearly inexperience is a large factor in young driver crash rates, particularly in the first six months of solo driving. A young driver needs to have automated the mechanics of driving and anticipating hazards before they go solo. The only way to develop this automatic ability is hours of supervised on-road practice. Achieving 120 hours is international best practice. Every New Zealand Learner driver needs a supervisor prepared to put hours into taking him or her out on the road, and building the database of experiences under a range of conditions. We fail our young people by allowing anyone onto the road without giving them this practice. Many young people do not have the family backgrounds that make this possible.

In short, there are many aspects of driving that can be taught, that can reduce risk and increase competence, and many of those can be delivered or facilitated through schools.

**Unit standards**

The AA Driver Education Foundation and Road Industry and Logistics Training ITO have developed and promoted in schools unit standards for light motor vehicles, and which contribute to a student's NZQA record. For some students, because of their natural interest in driving, these credits were the first credits ever achieved, leading to a 'virtuous circle' whereby other academic subjects became more achievable. There is evidence that students with unit standards in light motor vehicles are more attractive to some employers.

The Police are also in the process of developing a unit standard based road safety education plan. These initiatives should not be dependent on the good will and enthusiasm of individual teachers – they need to be supported by the Curriculum. There are other groups: Students Against Driving Drunk (SADD), Accident Compensation Corporation and Pro-Drive are existing programmes. The Alchemy programme, an incentive programme to achieve driving unit standards, is in many secondary schools. Rotary has recently introduced a new driver education programme. These need to be linked and coordinated into the curriculum and unit standard system.

**Driving as an attractor**

Many students, particularly teenage boys, are difficult to interest in traditional subjects. However this very group interested in cars and driving, and can immediately see its relevance. This interest can be used as a springboard to increase motivation in other areas. In schools that encourage driving unit standards, through the keen interest in driving, students have also achieved unit standards in other subjects such as English and Statistics (observing driving behaviour, and presenting reports and charts on their observations).

### **Driving and attitude to the law**

Driving is one of the first times that a teen has to decide whether to operate within the social agreement of laws or operate outside the system by driving unlicensed. There are wider benefits to society of encouraging students to operate within the system and think of themselves as law abiding citizens, as opposed to gathering fines and a history of offending and operating outside the law.

Low decile schools find their students are consistently driving outside of the driver licensing system. With many starting life outside of the law, they incur a progressive record of fines and penalties and a poor self concept in relation to society. There is a wide social impact on these young persons' future directions when they achieve a legitimate licence. Not only is it a source of pride and self esteem, but bringing these underprivileged students into the system changes their outlook on themselves and the world.

### **Driving and Development**

Most life skills are learned when students leave home or gain employment. Driving is a real life skill, required outside the classroom, that is learnt at age 15 while students are at school. Secondary schools are in a unique position to have the first opportunity to influence the development of this skill for students in Year 11 and over that will be used lifelong.

Further, education has been shown to directly enhance the development of the frontal lobes of the teenage brain in particular skill areas. It is important for the development of the appropriate road safety skills that teens are given driver education in this developmental phase.

### **Road Safety**

In addition to the driver education programmes referred to above, the AA also strongly supports wider pre-driver road safety education programmes in primary and secondary school. Many of these programmes are sound and well supported. The AA considers that these deserve even greater profile and attention from schools than currently. These programmes address the pedestrian and cycling safety, which help make them more observant as drivers and more considerate of vulnerable road users, and better able to judge traffic. It also assists with sense of direction and map placement.

### **Summary**

The draft Curriculum needs a fundamental rethink so that the key competencies recognise and acknowledge the important role that driving plays in modern culture and to reflect the real risks and opportunities that young people face. Thought needs to be given to how to generate a nationwide programme of driver education in schools, especially given the current lack of historical experience of schools in this area. The AA believes that national leadership will be required and that this needs to come through the Curriculum, by making driver education and road safety compulsory for all secondary schools. All schools should be required to prepare a Driver Education Plan.

The AA Driver Education Foundation, a charitable body with an independent Board, promotes driver education in New Zealand and works closely with driving instructors. AA DEF has read this submission and also fully endorses the opinions expressed in it.

Yours sincerely

**Mike Noon**  
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