

Road Safety Research Report No. 86

**Feeling Safe, Itching to Drive:
Pre-driver and Learner
Perspectives on Driving and
Learning**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The origins of, and influences on, the patterns of attitude and behaviour identified in earlier research with young drivers aged 17 to 25 were investigated in a series of workshops with young pre-drivers and learners, their parents and approved driving instructors (ADIs). The workshops focused in particular on understanding young pre-drivers' and learners' definitions of good driving and their expectations and/or experiences of the learning process.

Good driving

In our earlier research with 17–25-year-old drivers, we found that participants defined good driving as the mastery of three different and parallel kinds of activity, which we called the physical, social and emotional activities of driving.

In this research, we found that the definitions of good driving offered by young pre-drivers and learners included many references to the physical activity (especially control and awareness) and emotional activity (especially staying calm). However, on further probing, some of these definitions turned out to be problematic: in particular, many participants identified control with being able to drive fast.

Unlike the young drivers in the earlier research, there were almost no references to the social activity of driving or to the need to be patient and considerate with other drivers. On the other hand, the young pre-drivers and learners were far more likely to mention consideration for passengers as a feature of good driving – for instance, checking that passengers are wearing seat belts.

Pre-drivers' and learners' judgements that someone is a good driver are largely based on the fact that one feels safe in the car with them. The evidence suggests that this feeling of safety is not based on a cognitive assessment of the driver's behaviour but is an affective reaction to messages projected by the driver through their behaviour. Three types of message in particular seem to have a positive impact on the feeling of safety:

- confidence – I am able to deal with this situation;
- concern – I am looking after you (the passenger); and
- superiority – I am better than other drivers.

Analysis of these messages reveals some potential sources for patterns identified in our previous research (Christmas, 2007). The reliance of young drivers on confidence as a measure of ability and the 'talent' model appear to develop from the way in which confidence messages create a feeling of safety. Plus, the projection of

superiority may explain why young drivers are broadly forgiving of a tendency to aggression in their own behaviour.

The context for all of this is the ‘double insulation’ of young passengers, who are cut off from other drivers not just by the ‘bubble’ of the car but also by the fact that someone else is driving. Where that other person draws the passenger’s attention to other drivers, it is as complex (and annoying) physical obstacles, not as people sharing a common space. This helps to explain why the social activity of driving is largely absent from the accounts of good driving offered by pre-drivers and learners.

Further research would be valuable to establish exactly how and when the social activity of driving rises to prominence in the mind of the young pre-driver/learner/driver. However, this research strongly suggests that this depends on the disruption of the social space within the car, and, in particular, the ‘safe’ relationship between parent and child. The presence of an ADI in the car helps to preserve this social space – making the critical break point the moment after the test when a young person first drives on their own.

This account may also help to explain why ‘delayers’ (young people who do delay starting to learn) are more likely to mention the social activity of driving. This group are more likely to have been driven by their peers; and the experience of being driven by a very confident but clearly incompetent peer may disrupt the critical link between projected confidence and feeling safe.

The importance of the moment one drives on one’s own also sheds new light on the finding from our previous research (Christmas, 2007) that young drivers typically believe that the social activity of driving is not covered by the formal learning process, and that one only starts learning to drive after passing the test. It may be that many young people are only receptive to learning about the social activity of driving after they have driven on their own, i.e. after they have passed.

Participants in this research were clear that good driving is not just about what you do but also about what you do not do. In particular, it is important to resist two types of ‘temptation’ when one starts driving. The first of these is peer pressure. Strikingly, peer pressure seems to work only one way: to make driving worse, not better, with a number of young people telling us that their efforts to make friends drive more safely did not work. A potential mindset difference is apparent here, with some young drivers seeking to project messages of confidence and superiority (so ignoring requests to drive more safely), and others seeking to project messages of concern for passengers (so taking heed of them).

The second temptation is adrenaline, especially for those young drivers who have been driven fast by a driver who nevertheless projects confidence and makes them feel safe. However, this kind of behaviour is not necessarily ‘thrill-seeking’ in the

full sense of the term. Instead, a number of participants described putting one's foot down from time to time as a kind of boredom alleviation.

Good learners

The attitude of a young person during the period of formal learning is a critical variable in their future behaviour as a driver. Two dimensions were identified which determine how good a learner will be:

- On the one hand, the level of **concern** a learner feels about their readiness to pass will impact on their willingness to take criticism and listen. A young person's concern may be increased either because they have a higher estimation of the potential consequences of bad driving or because they have a lower estimation of their own current capability.
- On the other hand, the level of **impatience** a learner feels to pass – and to be out on the road driving – will influence the way in which they engage with the learning process. Many (though not all) young people are impatient for the freedom that driving is perceived to bring, with a much smaller number also being impatient for the experience itself. Impatience can be increased by competition with peers or siblings (to be the first to pass, in fewer lessons, etc.) and by the practical costs (money, time) of the learning process.

Taken together, these two dimensions define a simple grid onto which young learners can be plotted. Learners with a very low level of concern and high level of impatience provide the greatest cause for concern. Some of these may 'play the system', doing as they are told in lessons and in the test purely to speed up the process of getting a licence.

Good learning

According to participants in this research, learning to drive has two basic elements: mastering the activity of driving and getting the right attitude.

First-hand experience – or the experience of watching others drive – was felt to be critical to mastering the activity of driving, with some participants (young people, parents and ADIs) feeling that the current testing regime meant that some learners did not get enough experience before passing. By contrast, many participants were sceptical about the role of 'theory'.

There was near universal agreement that the teaching of driving should be left to professional instructors on the grounds that:

- parents' knowledge of driving is not up to scratch;
- the instructor–learner relationship is more conducive to feedback and learning than the parent–child relationship; and
- parents, lacking dual controls, are at risk with an inexperienced driver.

There was, by contrast, some debate about the appropriateness and value of supervised practice, with both parents and ADIs disagreeing on this.

A number of parents and ADIs wanted more parent–ADI communication. However, a challenge arises from the fact that parents are both supports to the learning process and paying clients. This can create a tension between a parent’s desire to ensure that the young people get the right amount of experience (analogous with a learner’s concern about readiness to pass the test) and their desire to ensure value-for-money (analogous with a learner’s impatience to pass). The latter can create scepticism about the motives of ADIs among parents and young people, which colours communication between them.

Experience was also felt to be critical to a person adopting the right attitude to being a good learner and driver, with a strong emphasis on the need for concrete and personal experiences in order to change attitudes. Some participants felt that this might include talking to people with experience of crashes.

For their part, parents discussed using insurance payments and car type as possible levers to build their children’s responsibility. The view was expressed, however, that parents need more support or guidance in tackling dangerous driving in their children. It was also noted that parents may not know about their children’s dangerous driving.

Some ADIs go further, trying to engineer safe situations which nevertheless feel dangerous in order to change the attitudes of the most worrying learners. However, there are clear limits on what they can do – as they cannot actually put anyone at risk. Many young people took the view that simulated risk, from which fear had been removed, could never really change an attitude. Some young people and ADIs also took the view that there is a hardcore of young drivers whose attitudes do not change even if they actually have an accident, and who can only be stopped by more punitive approaches.

Better drivers

In the light of this research and our previous research (Christmas, 2007), four critical gaps in current approaches to driver learning and testing are evident:

1. **The relevance gap.** Few young people – pre-drivers, learners or novices – see the standards in the test (and other rules of driving) as relevant to ‘real driving’.
2. **The measures gap.** Young people have no good way of measuring the competence of other drivers other than their own feeling of safety, and have no good way of measuring their own competence as drivers other than their feeling of confidence.

3. **The incentives gap.** There are a number of **disincentives** for young people to spend longer improving their driving pre-test, and few real incentives to carry on getting better after passing.
4. **The motivations gap.** A number of young people do not see any real need to get better, as they start the learning process already confident in their own talent which is reinforced by their rapidly mastering physical control of the car.

However, there are also some important opportunities to do more:

- Many young people would be interested in opportunities to develop driving skills at school or college – providing the learning opportunities are practical and hands on.
- Some young people identified PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) or Citizenship as a natural home in the curriculum for some aspects of learning about driving.
- Some parents would welcome more guidance on their role during learning and after the test, and, if made aware of the impact they are having, these parents might also think more about their behaviour as a driver when their children are in the passenger seat.
- Some experienced ADIs already seek to tailor their instruction to different mindsets and attitudes in young people, and more guidance and support for ADIs in this area could prove very effective.

Drawing on both phases of our research, we propose a pragmatic segmentation of young pre-drivers, learners and drivers, with the following five segments (see Table 5.1 for a fuller summary):

- **rule observers**, for whom good driving is about following rules and standards;
- **risk minimisers**, for whom good driving is risk-free driving;
- **good neighbours**, for whom good driving is sociable driving;
- **God's gifts**, for whom good driving is confident driving; and
- **nightmare drivers**, for whom good driving is entirely irrelevant.

1 INTRODUCTION

Earlier research conducted by SHM with young drivers aged 17 to 25 (Christmas, 2007) provided fresh insights into the way in which young people experience the learning process, their definition of its goal, good driving, and the implications of these for driving behaviour. Key findings from this earlier research included the following:

1. Young drivers define good driving as the mastery of three different and parallel kinds of activity:
 - (a) driving as a physical activity – safely controlling and guiding a physical object through a complex physical environment, including reading and anticipating the behaviour of other drivers;
 - (b) driving as a social activity – operating in a shared space in a way that ensures everyone is kept happy, and in a way that builds and maintains a desired image of oneself as a driver; and
 - (c) driving as an emotional activity – preserving an appropriate frame of mind to drive well in the face of distractions and annoyances.
2. Young drivers are highly sceptical about the formal learning they do for the test, and about the test itself. Many express the view that one starts to learn **after** one has passed the test and draw particular attention to the perceived failure of the formal learning process to address the ‘unwritten’ rules of driving – largely pertaining to the social activity of driving.
3. Young drivers rely heavily on their own feelings of confidence as a measure of their competence. This can lead to a vicious circle, in which the feeling of confidence becomes the grounds for feeling confident. In some young people, this is exacerbated by a ‘talent model’ of driving – put crudely, a belief that good drivers are born rather than made. There is evidence, however, that overconfidence may be less a cognitive error than a deliberate social act, aimed at positioning oneself in a particular way with passengers and other drivers.

The current research was designed to extend the insights of this previous research (Christmas, 2007) and, in particular, to investigate the possible origins of, and influences on, the patterns identified in our previous research.

The main phase of research consisted of nine qualitative workshops with groups of young people (85 in total), covering a range of different types of pre-driver and learner between the ages of 13 and 20. A further four workshops were with parents of some of the participants in these workshops (24 in total), along with three group interviews with ADIs (11 in total). Participants were recruited to ensure a mix of gender, social class and ethnicity, as well as diversity on other key dimensions (such as previous experience on a motorbike or moped). Workshops were held in five locations (Stockport, Yate, York environs, Leicester and Hounslow) in order to

ensure a mix of rural and urban pre-drivers and learners. Table 1.1 summarises the composition of the groups.

Table 1.1: Composition of the workshop groups		
Group	No. of workshops	Total participants
13–14-year-olds	2	20 (10 male, 10 female)
15–16-year-olds	3	27 (14 male, 13 female)
17–20-year-old learners	2	19 (9 male, 10 female)
17–20-year-old ‘delayers’	2	19, (9 male, 10 female)
Parents	4*	24 (11 fathers, 13 mothers)
ADIs	3	11

* One parent workshop was recruited for each of the four groups of young people, i.e. one group of parents of 13–14-year-olds, one group of parents of 15–16-year-olds, etc.

As we noted in our previous research (Christmas, 2007), young people are as diverse as any other group of people and we in no way wish to suggest that there is a typical ‘young person’ or ‘young person’s experience’. In line with our previous research, this report seeks to identify the key themes emerging from the analysis of workshop findings – both the points of commonality and key dimensions of difference. Again we have sought to illustrate our points with extensive quotations, so that readers may check our interpretation against the words of the young people themselves, their parents and their instructors.

We have also been helped immeasurably in this research by the opportunity to speak to a number of road safety officers, many of whom are already taking practical steps to tackle the kinds of challenge identified in this research. We are very grateful to the Local Authority Road Safety Officers’ Association (LARSOA) for facilitating these contacts. Their input has greatly aided our understanding of this field. However, the opinions offered in this report are entirely our own, and may not reflect the views of any individual consulted.

2 GOOD DRIVING

In our earlier research with 17–25-year-old drivers (Christmas, 2007), we found that participants defined good driving as the mastery of three different and parallel kinds of activity:

- driving as a **physical** activity – safely controlling and guiding a physical object through a complex physical environment, including reading and anticipating the behaviour of other drivers;
- driving as a **social** activity – operating in a shared space in a way that ensures everyone is kept happy, and in a way that builds and maintains a desired image of oneself as a driver; and
- driving as an **emotional** activity – preserving an appropriate frame of mind to drive well in the face of distractions and annoyances.

In the current research, we were keen to find out how the definition of good driving offered by pre-learners and learners would compare.¹ Section 2.1 offers a brief descriptive overview of the key points of similarity and difference, the significance of which are then discussed further in the sections that follow.

2.1 What is good driving?

References to the **physical** activity of driving were common in the accounts of good driving offered by participants. Control of the car was singled out by a number of participants as a critical feature of good driving:

‘[My dad] has a great sense of accuracy with his driving. He’s very poised. Knows what he’s doing. Seven tonne trucks down to small cars, he knows it immediately. He has awareness of how much room he’s got – there’s no chance of crashing.’ [M, 17, Delayer]

‘My sister Haley. She just . . . she can park well.’ [M, 13]

‘She [mum] controls the car – she can park quite well.’ [F, 14]

‘You have to be in control of the car and not let the car control you.’ [F, 14]

‘[He’s a good driver] because he’s confident. It’s his mum’s car, but she can’t get it out of the garage.’ [M, 15]

¹ In order to make the task of creating a definition of good driving more concrete – especially for the youngest age groups – participants were first asked to identify and describe a good driver. After this, they were then asked to create a definition of good driving based on their examples.

Participants also placed considerable emphasis on awareness:

‘She [mum] doesn’t get into any accidents. She’s quite safe when she drives. She’s looking around, looking at her mirrors.’ [M, 15]

‘He [my brother] looks . . . in the mirrors and everything. He looks out for bikes and everything.’ [F, 14]

‘My dad [is a good driver]. He’s been driving for ages, so he’s serious and he’s never crashed or anything. He’s always aware of everyone else around him. He’s always looking around to see what they’re doing.’ [F, 15]

‘My friend Natalie. She’s been driving for about two years and she’s just really cool. Like she won’t do anything if she doesn’t think it’s the right time or if she thinks it’s gong to be dangerous. And she’s just always checking everything, just making sure, observing everything around her . . . She’s constantly looking in her mirrors and you can just see that she’s looking around at everything that is happening around her.’ [F, 16]

The greatest emphasis in the accounts offered by the participants, however, was placed on driving as an **emotional** activity, and, in particular, the importance of staying calm in various potentially stressful situations:

‘My dad – he’s like really mellow. It’s personality. People cutting through lanes without signals, it doesn’t phase him. My mum’s always trying to go a bit faster, like over the speed bump, then she brakes just before it, then goes really fast. With my dad I don’t feel car sick, but with my mum I feel like my guts are going. He’s very calm. Nothing phases him.’ [F, 18, Learner]

‘[My dad] used to drive those big cargo lorries and those were the worst. That’s how he got used to not getting angry, because everyone moans at the lorry drivers. So he used to be [angry] but now he’s just normal and he don’t care if people shout at him or anything.’ [F, 16]

‘My dad [is a good driver] because he plans journeys, is good with a sense of direction, always knows the signs and routes. He doesn’t get angry – concentration levels, he’s quite calm. It’s when I go somewhere I don’t know that it panics me.’ [F, 20, Learner]

‘[My mum] is really patient. She always talks to me in the car, about what’s going on in the car, she makes me feel safe. My dad is the contrast – going down to my auntie’s at Xmas, we nearly crashed. He wasn’t really focusing. If he’s getting stressed or having an argument it’s quite often, but if he’s calm or not in a rush it’s fine.’ [F, 17, Learner]

‘My dad and my brother – they’re always relaxed, seem like they’re in control all the time. They’re just always in control, always laid-back when driving.’ [M, 20, Learner]

On closer probing, a number of the accounts of the physical and emotional activity of driving revealed more problematic views (from a road-safety point of view) on good driving:

‘[My dad is a good driver.] He goes fast, but he like controls it. He watches to see other people, and he knows what they’re going to do. Like on a motorway, he’ll move. He’s watching to see what will happen. Sometimes he skids and stuff, and he has had crashes, but I know he’s a good driver. Compared to my mum: she can’t park or anything . . . He gets wound up all the time. It gets on my nerves. Swears at people. He thinks he’s better than everyone else. I would like to drive like him because he knows what he’s doing . . . He’s had crashes and that.’ [F, 16]

In particular, the claim that someone had good physical control of the car was often backed up with an observation about how fast they could drive:

Question: ‘How do you know he’s good?’

‘The speed he drives. He’s fast on the roads . . . I like being in the car more with him than my mum, because she’s like too slow.’ [M, 15]

‘My cousin Ray. He drives fast but uses the mirrors. He’s never crashed and is cautious about checking mirrors. He’s been driving for about six years. He goes to cruises – 147 on the dual carriageway.’ [M, 18, Delayer]

‘[Good driver] Jeremy Clarkson. He does a programme called *Top Gear*. I’ve seen him drive cars around this airfield and he’s quite good at it. He drives quite quick and keeps control of it.’ [M, 13]

‘[Good driver] Michael Schumacher. He’s always in control of the car, he’s confident and he knows he’s good at it. Obviously he’s won the F1 title. If I were in a car with him, I’d feel safe because he can drive well. If he can do it in an F1 car at 200 mph, then he can do it in a Peugeot.’ [M, 14]

‘[Good driver] Police drivers who do the high-speed chases. They have to have lots of experience and training. My instructor was telling me, they have to be able to name everything they’ve been over, like a drain cover. They have to notice every little detail. At high speeds they can actually control a car and know what’s going on.’ [M, 18, Learner]

‘Speed [makes him a good driver]. He slows down at the right times and doesn’t get caught by speed cameras or anything.’ [M, 16]

Although more exotic examples of excellent physical control were also offered:

‘Some people can drive quite fast but still be safe.’ [F, 20, Learner]
‘My friend drives with his knees but he’s still a well good driver.’ [M, 18, Learner]

In a similar way, ‘emotional calm’ turned out, in some cases, to conceal less desirable mental states:

‘I had my dad and then realised how many points he has, so I scribbled it out. I feel safer with my mum, but I don’t know why. My dad’s quite an aggressive driver: if he sees an opening he’ll go for it.’ [M, 16]

‘My dad’s a good driver, but he’s certainly no role model because he’s recently been done for drink driving. He’s a very responsible man. But one day it happened and he’s been banned.’ [M, 19, Learner]

‘My mate’s a really good driver but he recently got done for drink driving. But I was really pissed as well.’ [M, 17, Learner]

‘I’ve been quite bad, getting in the car with people who were really pissed, in the countryside place. I was drunk as well, I needed to get home, can’t be bothered to pay for a taxi.’ [M, 20, Learner]

In line with the young drivers who participated in our earlier research, a number of participants in this research were sceptical about the relevance to good driving of the law or the standards set in the test:

Facilitator: ‘Why is the Highway Code important?’

‘That way you don’t get into trouble. If something happens, you can’t be accused of doing something bad.’ [M, 13]

‘You could be a good driver but not want to stick to the Highway Code. You could still be a good driver.’ [M, 14 – note, this participant’s father was a driving instructor]

‘No-one drives like how they do on the test.’ [M, 18, Learner]

‘The test is just to legitimise the fact you can drive, but doesn’t mean you can drive well.’ [F, 17, Delayer]

Although others did include being law-abiding as part of their definition of good-driving:

‘[My dad] sticks to the speed limit and doesn’t go too fast. He’ll go faster if he can go faster, but he’ll stick to the speed limit.’ [M, 16]

‘[My mum] drives differently to others. She doesn’t break the speed limit. Sometimes people drive fast and break the speed limits.’ [F, 13]

Overall, the accounts offered of the physical and emotional activities of driving by the participants in this research show broadly similar patterns to the accounts offered by young drivers in our previous research – albeit with predictably less sophistication at the level of detail.

However, when we turn to the **social** activity of driving, a major difference emerges. Indeed, one of the most striking features of the accounts of good driving offered by participants in this research was the near complete lack of emphasis on the social activity of driving. There were some exceptions to this general rule, especially in the workshops with young people aged 17–20 who had not yet started learning to drive (an observation we shall pick up later). Overall, however, words such as ‘patient’, ‘courteous’, ‘considerate’ and ‘polite’ – which had dominated definitions of good driving for those already driving – were largely absent from the definitions offered by pre-drivers and learners. Indeed, some parents independently drew attention to this difference of perspective when reviewing their own thoughts about good driving:

‘I don’t think my son will come up with things like that [patience and respect]. He’s more: a good driver is somebody who is in control of the car. That would be his perception at the moment.’ [Mother of M, 13]

‘A good driver is somebody who can keep a BMW on the road doing 90 mph around a corner – that’s a good driver according to my son.’ [Mother of M, 13]

On the other hand, while references to courtesy to other drivers were largely missing, references to **concern for passengers** as a defining feature of good driving were much more prominent in the accounts offered by pre-drivers – especially the younger age groups (under 17). In particular, a surprisingly large number of participants included some kind of reference to making passengers wear seat belts in their definitions of good driving.:

‘If all the people in the car have got their seat belts on, it shows the driver is a good driver. It shows the driver has not pulled off with passengers without their seat belt on.’ [M, 14]

‘[Good driver] My boyfriend. He’s just turned 20, and he’s been driving for two years. He’s a careful driver and he always has people in the car and he respects them. He wouldn’t disrespect them by putting them at risk. He sticks to the speed limits.’ [F, 16]

So why does this striking difference exist between the accounts of good driving offered by pre-drivers and learners on the one hand and by young drivers on the other? To start to answer this question, first it is helpful to take a step back and consider on what basis pre-drivers and learners are making their judgements of good driving.

2.2 Evidence for good driving

On what basis do pre-driver and learners distinguish between good and bad driving when they see it? The evidence from our participants shows that comparison with external standards plays no real role in the judgement. Even those young people who selected good drivers on the grounds that they ‘do everything they are meant to do’ were, on further probing, unable to say what any of these things actually are that one is ‘meant to do’.

A more common and more concrete piece of evidence offered for good driving was not having had an accident (or at least not having had an accident that was one’s own fault):

‘He [my dad] drives a lot for work and he hasn’t crashed yet. Sometimes he sticks to the speed limits, when he’s near a speed camera.’ [M, 15]

‘[My step dad] He’s been driving the longest out of my family. He knows the road. He’s been driving for 20 years and he hasn’t had any accidents that I know of yet. He tends to speed a little but he doesn’t go miles over the limit.’ [M, 15]

‘He’s [recently qualified friend] never crashed. And all his mates have all crashed in the first month.’ [M, 16]

Question: ‘Why is your dad a good driver?’
‘Because I’m still here!’ [M, 16]

Of course, avoiding accidents is a positive thing but it is worth noting that, for some pre-drivers, this ability to avoid accidents is very much presented in terms of having the level of control of the car needed to get you out of difficult situations, rather than the judgement to avoid getting into those situations in the first place. Consider the following story, offered by the participant as an example of excellent driving:

‘Like a couple of times he was driving and you know when a bus is stopping there, he’ll overtake him, right. So he had the right of way and he went, and the bus didn’t indicate out. So the bus was still there. The bus didn’t check its mirrors so he was coming out and went into the car . . . I was sat in the passenger seat. I saw the bus coming so close and the buses from this side were coming as well. So we was going to get sandwiched. I don’t know what he done, but he just sped, went a bit faster, swerved in and out and he just got away from it. As soon as he got away from it he parked it down the side and asked if we were alright. So he knows when something’s going to happen. He’ll react within seconds . . . Two of my friends have offroaded their car and mad. And the way he drives, I was seriously thinking my brother would crash within the first few weeks, but he hasn’t. He’s got through it all and every single time he hasn’t made a mistake, as far as I’ve seen.’ [M, 16]

While the past-tense quality of not having had accidents was an important piece of evidence in participant’s estimates, far more significant was the future-tense estimation that the driver in question would not have accidents in the future. Again and again this boiled down to the simple fact of **feeling safe** with someone:

‘It feels safe and that. He knows what he’s doing. He’s confident.’ [F, 14]

‘[My mum] knows what she’s doing. I feel safe when she’s driving, I can tell she’s not doing anything wrong.’

Question: ‘How do you know?’

‘I don’t know.’ [F, 14]

‘He [my dad] is careful and quite fast at the same time. He makes me feel safe when I’m in the car with him. He does stick to the speed on like a normal road, but not when he’s on the motorway.’ [M, 13]

‘He [dad] makes you feel quite safe. When you’re sat in the back and watch him – he knows what he’s doing.’ [F, 17, Learner]

‘My dad [is a good driver]. He’s very cautious. He’s never made me jump. Not like my mum . . . She’s never crashed, so must be alright, but dad’s better.’ [M, 17, Delayer]

‘In the car I feel safe even though he’s quite fast.’ [M, 15]

‘Some people could say my step-dad is a bad driver cos he’s been done for drunk driving, but you feel ok with him.’ [M, 15]

‘My brother is a good driver. I feel safe in his car because he’s aware of what’s going on, compared to me and my sister. When I’m in her car I’m

nervous. It's probably because he's been driving longer. I don't know.'
[M, 19, Learner]

'My mum [is a good driver]. She's calm and I feel safe in the car with her. She's just aware. She's not in her own world.' [F, 19, Learner]

'My mum has driving involved in her job, but I am generally scared of her. She's stressed out and stalling all the time. Experience helps, but not always.' [M, 19, Learner]

'It doesn't make much difference who's driving, as long as I trust them.'
[F, 15]

As some of the quotations above indicate, the feeling of safety may be linked to some broad description of behaviour, such as being cautious, calm or in control. However, it is an open question whether these observations of behaviour are being used as the **basis** for a cognitive assessment of safety or whether they are, in fact, **post-rationalisations** of a more fundamental affective state which is not based on an assessment of driving behaviour at all. If the latter interpretation is true, then it is the young person's definition of good driving behaviour which is derived from the feeling of safety – rather than the feeling of safety being based on a prior understanding of good driving.

In fact, participants' responses provided considerable support for the latter interpretation. The critical factor in feeling safe appears to be how the driver positions themselves with respect to the passenger and to other drivers on the road. It is the **messages embedded in driver behaviour**, rather than an analysis of that behaviour, which build or erode the feeling of safety. In particular, driving behaviour may project the following key messages, which are discussed in more detail in the sub-sections that follow:

- confidence – I am able to deal with this situation;
- concern – I am looking after you; and
- superiority – I am better than other drivers.

2.2.1 *Confidence: I am able to deal with this situation*

Fear is infectious. A number of participants pointed out how a driver who is nervous will make his or her passengers feel nervous too – and therefore unsafe as well:

'My dad is really calm – unlike my mum who's a bit crazy . . . Calmness helps you relax as a passenger, you don't think they're all manic. My mum will see a lorry, she'll get all scared and nervous, then you get all scared and nervous. On the other hand. . . he does always think that he's got the

right of way compared to other drivers. He's a bit forceful.' [F, 17, Learner]

'She doesn't want an accident. She's not being over the top, she's being careful. She is quite confident actually, to be honest, and that makes a difference. It would make you feel scared yourself [if she weren't].' [F, 15]

'My dad. He's experienced, driving a long time, always in control. Quite focused. Sometimes my mum is having a conversation, gets flustered . . . When you're sat in the back and watch him – he knows what he's doing.' [F, 17, Learner]

'My dad and mum are the same, but I prefer dad. My mum takes ages to move out, my dad does it quickly. He's more controlled and everything and doesn't worry. My mum goes on the motorways and worries. My dad doesn't need to think about it. She just goes on all the time: I just think "get on with it".' [M, 16]

'My step mum is unsafe – she's a bit panicky and jumpy.' [M, 13]

The key point at issue in each of these cases is not how the driver is driving but the messages they are sending out to their passengers about their emotional state. Sometimes, however, what we might call the 'emotional smoothness' of a confident driver was linked to a physical smoothness in the driving experience – especially for learners, for whom the nerves of starting out may be directly linked to the difficulty of mastering the controls of the car:

'It's just like, when [dad] is driving it's always smooth, never jerky. He never seems to get into any bother.' [M, 15]

'My dad drives pretty fast, he's got a nice safe car and things. He's very smooth and I'm very jittery and rigid.' [M, 17, Learner]

It is worth making a connection here to the finding in our previous research that young drivers use their own feelings of confidence as the main measure of how good they are as a driver. In the context of the current research with pre-drivers, it makes sense to suggest that this reliance on confidence is an **extension** of the reliance, as passengers, on feelings of safety which are based on projected confidence. The reliance on feeling safe as evidence for good driving, in the absence of any detailed understanding of what good driving behaviour actually looks like, may also explain another theme from our first phase of research. In a number of cases, there is evidence that participants attribute the impressive combination of emotional and physical smoothness to something like natural **talent**:

‘It seems to come really natural to him [dad]. He’s never been in an accident that was his fault. He seems to read the road really easily.’ [M, 15]

‘He’s [dad] been driving like years and only ever had one crash. He’s just dead good at driving. He can drive really fast. He’s never had a crash. You always feel safe. He’s just dead good at driving.’ [F, 13]

‘My brother [is a good driver] because he has judgement. He drives very fast. He has good judgement . . . If he’s overtaking someone or something, it’s whether he’ll make it or whatever. He’s a natural.’ [M, 18, Learner]

‘Ability obviously you can learn, because they test it. Confidence – that you’re like born with.’ [M, 14]

2.2.2 *Concern: I am looking after you*

Messages received about a driver’s state of confidence or nervousness are critical elements of a passenger’s feeling of safety. Equally important, however, is the belief that one’s own wellbeing is an issue for the driver. As was noted in Section 2.1, showing concern for passengers was an important theme in the definitions offered of good driving. Evidence of this concern, or a clear motive for concern (as in the last quotation below), was critical to the feeling of safety:

‘She’s a couple of years older than me, so she’s been driving for a few years. And she’s always asking if we feel comfortable and she’s always looking for everything.’ [F, 16]

‘[Good driver] My mum. I’m one of seven children. My mum’s always had babies in her car and doesn’t want to cause an accident with them.’ [F, 15]

‘My manager [of my band] is always careful because we are young and he doesn’t want to crash busloads of 16-year-olds. He’ll get done by the management.’ [M, 17, Learner]

In many instances, the feeling of safety was explicitly based on the relationship of the driver to the passenger. These examples are some of the clearest cases of definitions of good driving behaviour being derived from the feeling of safety, rather than vice-versa:

‘He’s [Dad] never had a crash. You trust him. You just feel safe. When you’re in the car with your mates you don’t feel as safe.’

Question: ‘Why?’

‘I don’t know. Cos it’s your dad. You trust your dad.’

Question: ‘With mates you don’t feel safe?’

‘Sometimes. There’s been a few near misses.’

Question: ‘What do you notice about what your dad’s doing?’

‘I don’t know. I don’t notice. I’m just in the car.’ [M, 16]

Question: ‘Why aren’t you nervous?’

‘Because he’s my dad, and I know he’s careful when it’s me because I’m his daughter and that.’ [F, 16]

‘I really feel safe with him [Dad]. He’s always protected me. He makes me feel safe.’ [F, 17, Delayer]

2.2.3 *Superiority: I am better than other drivers*

So far we have seen how a driver can make a passenger feel safe if they project confidence about the situation and concern for the passenger. However, what about the other drivers on the road? Does a driver contribute to their passengers’ feelings of safety, for instance, by projecting consideration or courtesy towards other drivers?

Sadly, the answer seems to be no. As we have already seen in Section 2.1, pre-drivers and learners seem to be almost oblivious to the social activity of driving as defined by young drivers. Perhaps this is not so surprising if drivers are in some way insulated from other drivers by the ‘bubble’ of the car, and young passengers are, arguably, doubly insulated – by the ‘bubble’ of the car, and by the fact that someone else is driving:

‘The problem with car driving, I’m sure we’re all familiar, is you get in the car and you are in an insulated environment, you are cut off, to some extent, from the rest of the world.’ [ADI]

Question: ‘Are there things outside the car too?’

‘I don’t know.’ [M, 15]

In contrast to the definitions offered by young drivers in our previous research, which emphasised the shared social space of the road, pre-drivers and learners focused on the social environment **within** the car. This is not, of course, to say that pre-drivers are unaware of other cars on the road:

‘When you’re sitting in the passenger seat you’re not sitting there with your eyes closed. You’re just as aware as the person that’s driving the car. If you’re coming up to a junction, you’ll naturally look for them as well and sometimes they ask you [not clear]. So sometimes you take part in the actual driving. They say: “is your side clear?”’ [M, 16]

The evidence suggests, however, that they are aware of those cars as complex physical obstacles (part of the physical activity of driving) rather than as other

drivers with whom road space needs to be shared. In one of the workshops parents discussed the difference between a pre-driver's mechanical understanding of the road and a more nuanced view developed through experience:

'Well, sometimes when I brake and I go, "oh God", and Richard will say, "mum, you had right of way there, why didn't you pull in . . .?"' [Mother of M, 17, Learner]

'But whether you've got right of way or not, if you think, well, he's going to come on, come what may, I'll give way.' [Father of F, 17, Learner]

'That's experience, because a younger one would go, whether he was coming or not.' [Father of M, 18, Learner]

This way of seeing other drivers on the road is almost certainly not helped by the way in which the attention of pre-drivers is drawn to those other drivers. There was no evidence that the good drivers identified by our participants ever talked about other cars on the road as containing people with whom space needs to be shared. Although there was plenty of evidence that they talked about these other cars as annoying and erratic obstacles:

'He [dad] sometimes shouts at other people. It sort of embarrasses me. But no-one ever does anything to him really. He's always commenting like "He's a bad driver".' [M, 15]

'He's [dad] aware of other people on the road.'

Question: 'How can you tell?'

'He's normally shouting at them!' [F, 17, Learner]

'She [my mum] pays attention to people on the road.'

Question: 'How do you know she's paying attention?'

'She acknowledges things that people have done wrong.' [F, 14]

'My dad points out other bad drivers. He says their driving too close to the other car.' [M, 17, Delayer]

'When he sees someone driving badly, he doesn't speak about them in a nice way.' [F, 16]

Comments like these do not just reinforce the perception of other drivers as annoying and erratic obstacles, they also serve to position the driver in a way that further contributes to the passenger's feeling of safety: as someone who is better at driving than others on the roads. Of course, this only applies if the comments also project confidence as well: getting flustered by other people's bad driving does not contribute to a passenger's feeling of safety, but getting angry with them can. A driver does not contribute to a passenger's feeling of safety by communicating

courtesy and consideration for other cars on the road but by communicating superiority to them.

Before leaving this topic, it is also worth noting a possible connection to an observation made in our previous research with young drivers (Christmas, 2007). In that research, we found that young drivers described the emotional activity of driving in terms of a balance between being too aggressive on the one hand and too cowed by other drivers on the other hand. We also noted, however, that this balance was not perfect: people were broadly forgiving of a tendency to aggression in their own behaviour. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the source of this pattern lies in a similar imbalance in pre-driving days, when confident aggression contributed to feelings of safety as a passenger in a way that flustered submission never could.

2.3 The absent social dimension

In Section 2.2, we have argued that pre-drivers' estimates of good driving are based not on a cognitive analysis of driving behaviour but on an affective response to messages sent out by the driver around confidence, concern (for the passenger) and superiority (over other drivers). The pre-driver passenger is doubly insulated from the other people with whom road-space is shared and, for them, the salient social arena is not on the road but **within** the car.

Given this, it is not hard to return to the problem posed at the end of Section 2.1 and see why the social activity of driving – so prominent in the definitions offered by young drivers – is replaced in the accounts of pre-drivers and learners by an emphasis on looking after passengers. In particular, we have seen that drivers are likely to draw attention to other drivers as complex physical obstacles, not as people sharing a common space. The descriptions offered by young people and their parents about the kinds of conversation they had about driving while in the car made it clear that the focus of these conversations was entirely on the physical activity of driving:

‘When [daughter] was about 15 she used to ask you what gear, and why you were moving into that gear, because she’s been desperate to learn. She’s always wanted to learn.’ [Mother of F, 17, Learner]

‘In the car I feel safe because he [dad] does everything right. He checks his mirrors in the right places. He’s taught me as well – like when to check your mirrors and all that. I watch him as well. I’m learning from him.’ [M, 14]

‘My dad asks me questions: “What have I got to do next?” It’s annoying but it really helps.’ [F, 17, Learner]

‘Which is why, when I’ve got [my daughter] in the car, and she’s sitting in the passenger seat, then I’ll try and give a bit of a running commentary, like you do on the advanced test, you’ve got to give a running commentary of the hazards that you perceive ahead, and that sort of thing, so that she’s got a little bit more idea of what I’m looking for on the road.’ [Father of F, 17, Learner]

‘She knows everything about the car, if you ask her about the gas, clutches. She has never sat down on the driver’s seat, but she knows everything. She knows the signs when we are going on the motorway.’

Question: ‘And how has she learnt all that?’

‘Well, by watching television I think. She picked it up somehow but she knows a lot more about the signs and everything.’ [Father of F, 13]

This lack of awareness of the social activity of driving can be very problematic. When young people finally get behind the wheel – and a number of those we spoke to had done this at some point before the age of 17 – their initial focus is likely to be on the basic physical control of the car. For many, indeed, these first experiences will be in off-road conditions which explicitly factor out any social dimension of driving. For those young people who quickly master gears and steering (perhaps drawing on earlier experience with a motorbike or moped), the result can be an increase in confidence:

‘I’ve drove my mum’s car. I couldn’t do it at first. I kept stalling. But when I could do it, it was alright. It was in the car park. It made me more confident.’ [M, 15]

‘I’ve been behind the wheel on the beach, in my dad’s car. He asked me if I wanted to. It felt good. I think it will make me more confident.’ [F, 14]

‘I had a pre-17 lesson. We went on some estate. With an instructor. It was pretty good. When I started I was pretty nervous, but as I kept on going it got better and I got more confident. Just driving round and changing gears – gives you more confidence when you go out on the roads.’ [M, 15]

‘We just drove along, drove around, round Ashford, and whoa . . . Then we came back and I’d never been so happy in my life because I found it so easy with the gears and everything, because when you ride a motorbike it’s exactly the same thing, but you use your hands.’ [M, 16]

‘So you get more confidence when you’re behind the wheel before you go with your instructor . . . when you get in with your driving instructor, you’re making a good first impression . . . Then your driving instructor will think: at least he’s got a feel, he’s confident behind the wheel.’ [M, 16]

Combined with a lack of awareness of the social activity of driving, this first flush of confidence can translate into a belief that one pretty much knows how to drive:

‘I’ve been driving for about two years. [Up at friend’s farm.] I think I’m alright. It’s just the signs and that that I’m worrying about.’ [M, 13]

Some parents, in particular, expressed concerns on this score – although they were not necessarily able to articulate clearly what it was that their children were lacking:

‘He used to have a mini that he used to race with one of his friends on a private track, so he can drive . . . So he thinks that by the time he is 17 and a half he would have passed. He doesn’t realise the ins and outs of the test, he just thinks because he can change gear, stop and go, he can do it. But there is a lot more to it.’ [Mother of M, 13]

‘Because he’s had this sort of driving experience off-road, so he knows the basic mechanics of steering the car and changing gear and things like that, but it’s the road sense and all the rules of the road [that he lacks].’ [Father of F, 17, Learner; describing character]

In one instance, a parent’s description suggested that they too lacked a sense that there might be more to driving than the physical activity of controlling the car:

‘He [14-year-old son] has driven a car, driven tractors, forklift. He’s got a motorbike . . . All illegal apart from the motorbike . . . I’ve been in the car and he’s quite safe.’

Question: ‘Who did he learn it from?’

‘I think he’s probably just watched us and just took it from there – it just comes natural to him. He’s one of those kids that picks things up easy like that.’

Question: ‘Do you think he’s actually got quite a good idea of what goes on, on the road?’

‘Oh yes, most definitely. He’s good at reversing, parking . . . I mean when he’s been on the forklift, I mean you’ve got to be careful on forklifts because you’ve got to be in the right position at the right time and he just seems to have that knack.’ [Mother of M, 14]

Advanced driving instructors (ADIs) also described the importance of trying to introduce young people to the social activity of driving as part of the learning process:

‘People come to me and they say, “I want to know how to drive”. All they intend is to pass their test. But when they’ve passed their test, most of the time they can’t really drive. They know how to move; it’s the difference between moving the car out from one place, changing gears along the

road, and actually knowing what's happening on the road. The road is shared by lots of people. There's rules. If everybody follows the rules then everything goes fine, and you understand how the car operates, you understand why they make the rules on the road.' [ADI]

'It's a social contract, effectively. If you don't take part in that social contract, and, as you're saying, agree to abide by the rules, you're going to be stuffed. And what I try to do, towards the end of a course of driving lessons, when people have already got a driving test booked, is I'm trying to make sure that they really can drive independently.' [ADI]

All of which leaves us facing an important question. We have seen that pre-drivers lack the awareness that young drivers have of the social activity of driving; that this gap in their understanding can be very problematic when they start learning to drive; and that plausible explanations for the gap can be found in their experiences of being a passenger and, in particular, in the experience of 'feeling safe'. But **when** and **why** does the gap get filled in?

One of the striking features of the current research was that mention of the social activity of driving was not only largely lacking from the accounts offered by pre-drivers aged up to 17, but also from the accounts offered by learners. One might anticipate that actually getting behind the wheel and onto the road and experiencing what it's like to drive would be the moment of 'rude awakening', but the evidence does not seem consistent with this idea.

So what is going on? One possible explanation more in tune with the evidence is that, for a proper awareness of the social space of driving to develop, **the social space within the car has to be disrupted first** –in particular, the 'safe' relationship between parent and child. While a person is learning with an instructor, however, this disruption is delayed. It is striking, for instance, how much emphasis participants placed on the need to have an instructor with whom one felt comfortable, and who would not make one feel nervous or knock one's confidence. Indeed, a young person who is not made to **feel safe** (most of the time) by their instructor may be just as likely to change instructors as to think that there is something wrong with their own driving. The instructor takes over the role of a driver in providing an extra layer of 'insulation' from the social space of the road, by giving instructions, managing dual controls and sustaining one's confidence with appropriate messages:

'You need to know the instructor. Because you know what he's going to do.' [M, 14]

'You don't feel right in a car with someone you don't know. You don't know anything about them.' [M, 13]

‘You have to like your driving instructor. They have such a big impact, like teachers have a big impact. If you don’t like your instructor, you won’t enjoy what you’re doing. They’ve got to know where you’re coming from, because you’re going to be nervous and they need to understand. And they need to be down-to-earth, more of a friend. You listen to your friends more than a teacher. If you feel relaxed you will be able to take in what they’re saying.’ [F, 16]

Instead the critical breakpoint comes after the test, when one drives on one’s own for the first time:

‘[After passing] they’re not used to being on their own. They’ve just spent the past 6 to 10, 12 months with somebody sitting next to them. And the first time they drive on their own is the afternoon after they’ve passed the driving test. If they’ve got a car sat on the driveway, you drop them off, and they say “oh, I’m off up so and so this afternoon”. I tell them, you take a friend with you. Because all of a sudden they’re on their own.’
[ADI]

The idea that there is a disruption of the social space within the car that precipitates a greater awareness of the shared space outside the car may also help to explain another phenomenon noted in this research – that young people in the ‘delayer’ groups (those who were old enough to start driving but had chosen not to) were far more likely to draw attention to the social activity of driving and, on a more general level, the importance of a ‘good attitude’ to good driving:

‘There’s nothing in the test about being considerate. They should test how much you care about other people.’ [F, 17, Delayer]

‘There’s no way to get people to drive the way they should be driving all the time if they’ve got the wrong attitude.’ [F, 17, Delayer]

‘Like this recent proposal to make it 100 hours of learning. You could do 1,000 hours of learning, but it makes no difference. It’s not going to change the outcome of the test. It won’t change unless they want to.’

[M, 17, Delayer]

Why should these young people, who have not yet got behind the wheel, be the ones who place more emphasis on these aspects of good driving? We should note that one possible reason, which cannot be discounted by this research, is that it is **because** they are the kind of people who are more concerned about activity and more aware of the shared space in which driving takes place that they have chosen to delay driving. Another explanation, however, may lie in the fact that ‘delayers’ are more likely than younger pre-drivers to have been driven by their peers who have already learned to drive. For the younger groups, it was striking just how limited a pool of drivers they had to draw on in thinking about good driving:

‘I get in the car with my dad most. No-one else in the family drives much.’
[F, 13]

Question: ‘Is your dad better than other people?’

‘I never really get into the car with anyone else.’ [M, 15]

By contrast, ‘delayers’ (and some learners) were much more likely to describe experiences of being driven by their peers:

‘Most of the lads at my college are bad drivers. They just want to go fast. This one guy turned his car over and still doesn’t care. I went in one car for five minutes with someone quite good – but I wouldn’t trust him. They’re just like: “I can drive now, let’s go as fast as I can and see if I can control it at high speed”. They’re rubbish.’ [F, 17, Delayer]

‘Harry, my mate [is a good driver]. He’s really slow, not very bright, but I know I’m safe because he’s so involved with the driving. He’s really patient about things, so you can’t really talk to him. He’s just thinking about the road. It’s all about attitude. I’ve got idiot friends who try to impress with messing around, overtaking on hills and stuff. But I’d rather be in his car.’ [M, 18, Delayer]

‘I had a friend – on the day of the test, she crashed. A couple of months later – I felt unsafe driving with her. She didn’t have control. I was worried, but she didn’t seem concerned about it. She was singing along to the music, she wasn’t actually in the car. Going round corners like you were all over the place. She was dancing as well.’ [M, 17, Learner]

Driving with a friend whose projected confidence is so clearly at odds with their actual capability may be exactly the kind of experience that will disrupt the cosy social space within the car and prompt a young person to look outside the car. As we shall see in Section 4, it is exactly this kind of ‘shaking’ experience which young people, parents and ADIs all feel is needed to change attitudes to driving.

The idea that it is the disruption of the social space within the car – and in particular the ‘safe’ relationship between parent and child – that drives a change in perspective is consistent with the evidence from the current research, but it cannot by any means be said to be proven. We recognise that further research is needed in this area. In particular, a longitudinal study which enabled comparisons of individuals’ perceptions of driving at key moments in their learning trajectory would be invaluable in shedding more light on when, why and how young people’s understanding of good driving develops. We believe that our qualitative research with pre-drivers and learners, in conjunction with our previous research with young drivers, could provide a solid conceptual basis for quantitative studies in this area.

In the meantime, the findings from this research throw an interesting new light on one of the key themes from our previous research with young drivers: their recurring complaint that the social activity of driving is governed by ‘unwritten rules’ which formal learning and testing simply do not address. The current research suggests that the problem may lie not only in the learning but also in the learners. If young people only begin to fully experience the social aspects of driving when they drive on their own, i.e. after they have passed the test, then it is only at this point that they will realise what it is they needed **to have learned** previously. Prior to this realisation, they may not appreciate the importance of the information they are given – for instance, the many ‘unwritten rules’ that are in fact written down in the *Highway Code*.

Put simply, the oft-repeated adage that ‘you only start learning when you’ve passed the test’ may conceal a deeper truth: that young people are only **receptive** to learning things when they have passed the test.

2.4 Driving temptations

Good driving is not just about what you do, it is also about what you do not do – and participants’ responses suggested that this is especially the case during the early stages of driving, when young drivers might be particularly susceptible to two types of temptation: peer pressure and adrenaline. These are discussed in the sub-sections that follow.

2.4.1 Peer pressure

Peer pressure was a major theme in the discussions with young pre-drivers and learners – although, predictably, the majority felt it was something that they themselves would be able to resist:

‘You get bad influences from friends. My friend, when she’s with the influence of one of her friends, she gets a bit stupid, because she wants to fit in with the group, because they’ll think she’s a wuss.’ [F, 16]

Question: ‘Why do people do stupid things when they know what might happen?’

‘Because they think they’re cool. They think they’re clever.’ [M, 15]

‘And you’ve seen the people: they’ve got their fast cars like and they aren’t going to plod past at 30 mph if there’s people looking, are they? They’re going to slam their car if they see someone looking and they get naïve. Young people are naïve: they think they’re rally drivers as soon as they get in the car.’ [M, 15]

‘Half of it is peer pressure as well, because with some people’s mates, you’re totally not one of those people but you’re with your friends and

they all rob people or something like that. And they say, oh go on, take that bag or nick that boy's phone, just keep pushing and pushing. It's the same sort of thing with driving. So you've got your mate sitting next to you and he's like, oh, come on, speed up a little. And you speed up and end up killing yourself or killing somebody.' [M, 16]

'People in the car with you want you to go fast because they don't care. It's not their car. And they want you to go fast . . . They're like, go on, go on, do this mate, do that.' [M, 15]

'That's why people go faster, to impress mates. They might not be impressed, but people still do it.' [M, 17, Delayer]

'It's the opposite.' [M, 18, Delayer]

'It's bravado. Attention. They're driving thinking: I can do it, I've got a car.' [M, 17, Delayer]

'Afterwards, your mates think you're an idiot.' [F, 17, Delayer]

'[Describing a character] He thinks he's the big man and the top dog. He gets out of his face and drunk. He comes from a nice family but in a bad area. He wants to be a rebel and do things that his family don't. He goes round with his mates in their cars, they're proper boy-racers round this little estate. He loves it, and he wants to do it as well. He wants to be like his mates, because he's influenced by them. He's trying to be the same.' [M, 14]

'Everyone shows off, with all due respect. It's just in which way you do it. Everyone gets excited and shows their mates.' [F, 16]

Some parents also expressed concerns about whether their children would succumb to peer pressure – although we cannot of course rule out the possibility that, in some instances, blaming peers may simply be a strategy for a parent to avoid directly acknowledging the culpability of their own children's behaviour:

Question: 'Have you any concerns about your child starting to drive?'

'Easily led.'

Question: 'Easily led, by mates?'

'Mates, as soon as he passes say "Oh, come on, do this, X, do that, X", and X will do it.' [Father of M, 16]

'This young lad [friend of son], he is a lovely lad, and he's had a lot of family problems, and he's got up and he's worked so many hours, he's the hardest working young man, and he's bought this little banger, what I would say. He'd insured it through his dad, and he'd crashed his car, and his car's a write off. But that wouldn't have happened if they all hadn't been with him in the back, it was just one of those scenarios and he's

really learnt his lesson, but it's a hard lesson to learn.' [Mother of M, 17, Learner]

Given the amount of importance attached to peer pressure, it is important to note that the direction of influence all seems to be one way – to make driving worse, not better. A number of the young people we met told us that they had tried to influence positively the driving of friends – for example by telling them to drive more slowly – but that their requests had been ignored. This is rather puzzling: if the only thing that is influencing behaviour is the fact that a peer is applying pressure, then that pressure ought to work equally either way. So what might be going on?

The answer lies in part in the analysis offered previously in Section 2.2. If a good driver is someone who communicates **confidence** and **superiority** to his or her passengers, then a young driver may feel strongly incentivised to communicate these same things to peers. Consciousness of the kind of image one projects as a driver is apparent in conversations such as the following about ADIs:

'I don't like his [an ADI's] style. He looks like a bit of a tool when he drives.' [M, 17, Learner]

'I know what you mean. They don't move their necks. They're nervous.'
[M, 20, Learner]

'They tell you not to cross your arms. It's the steering. My instructor drives differently when he drives home. He's an idiot I think.' [M, 18, Learner]

The idea that 'peer pressure' is actually driven by a desire to project a particular image of oneself as a driver fits well with the suggestion, made in our earlier research (Christmas, 2007), that the overconfidence of young drivers is not a cognitive error but a purposeful act.

The obvious problem with this line of argument, however, is that – as we saw in Section 2.2 – a good driver is also someone who communicates **concern** to his or her passengers. A number of the young people we spoke to criticised those who persist in driving dangerously even when requested not to:

'He's [friend K] on my estate where I live and all the boys are like 18 now and they've all just passed their tests. And they've all got cars. And at night I just hear them screeching around and around, and K doesn't bother. He just leaves his car at home and he waits 10 minutes before he goes, does everything, has everyone got their seat belts on? And yeah. And like every traffic light he'll make sure you've got your seat belt on and if you haven't, it's like: get out . . . I've been in this boy called ___'s car once and like he's really dangerous. You know the seat belts. If you pull back the seat they pull down and there's a bit for your seat belt to go in. And he

doesn't check or anything. He just drives around. But K makes sure that you've got your seat belt on.' [F, 15]

In situations in which the passengers in a car are egging the driver on, of course, then the potential restraining influence of the desire to project concern is removed: peer pressure, on this account, is actually the **absence** of a pressure to stay safe. However the question remains: why do attempts by peers to influence driving positively seem to have so little effect on some young drivers?

The explanation almost certainly rests in mindset differences between young people, which lead them to place different emphases on the three elements of the good driver image presented in Section 2.2 (concern, confidence and superiority). For some young drivers, concern for passengers is paramount, and confidence and superiority are seen as unimportant or even slightly ridiculous:

Question: 'What makes a bad driver?'

'Show-offs. Like my friend's dad, jumping lanes. "You better not do this in the test."' [F, 18, Learner]

For others, it is the dimension of concern for passengers that is largely lacking. It is worth noting, in this respect, that participants in this research identified some obvious aspirational images of confident, superior drivers in popular culture – but none of concerned drivers:

'The same with young drivers at 17, just passed, and they watch something like *Too Fast, Too Furious* or *Top Gear* or something like that, and they see these new fast cars going 120 mph down the road and nearly having a motor crash. And they think: yeah, I want to do that, I want to be like that, and they end up crashing.' [M, 16]

'*Top Gear* just makes you want to jump in a Ferrari and go.' [M, 19, Learner]

Before leaving the topic of peer pressure, it is worth noting that as well as identifying with or rejecting images of **good** drivers that exist in popular culture, young drivers must also wrestle with popular conceptions of **young** drivers – or indeed of young people in general. The fact that these popular conceptions, thanks to their statistical basis, leads to higher insurance premiums increases the desire of some young people to actively prove those conceptions wrong. The desire to 'prove adults wrong' might prove an interesting starting point for efforts to influence the driving behaviour of some young people:

'There's too many people crashing and giving the youngsters a bad name, which is why it's . . . ' [M, 15]

'Yeah, but then again everyone's got a bad name. I walk down the street

sometimes and I get old people holding their bags like I'm going to rob them. Everyone treats young people as if they're all the same, so they see someone and because of what he talks like, they think he's someone that's going to rob everyone, which he's not. I mean, I've been here five years now, and never have I ever robbed anyone, do you know what I mean?' [M, 16]

'Usually when younger people have passed, they go around like boy racers. They drive like maniacs. But I won't.' [M, 15]

2.4.2 *Adrenaline*

Just as some people like roller coasters, so some people get a thrill from driving fast:

'You know like when you go on a roller coaster and it goes really fast, and you want to do it again, it's like when you're in a car that's really fast and there's no cars on the road and you go really fast, you keep wanting to do it again because you get really excited.' [F, 15]

The two experiences are, of course, far from identical:

'I like roller coasters and doing that stuff but the thing is, you're always thinking it's a roller coaster; they're 100% safe . . . But a car, you can lose control.' [F, 16]

But for young passengers, feeling safe with a driver who projects concern, superiority and confidence, the experience can be experienced in quite similar ways:

'It feels great, because he [my uncle] goes fast. I don't get scared – but it's very fast though.'

Question: 'How does that make you feel?'

'That I wouldn't like to be in a crash. I don't think I'm going to be in a crash. But I wouldn't like to be in it.' [M, 13]

'I have a thing about fast cars . . . My boyfriend has a twin turbo – get an adrenaline rush, a thrill from the speed. I've seen him do 180 when we were out.' [M, 17, Delayer]

'I don't know why I chose my dad first. It can be quite fun, an aggressive driver. It's just like the adrenaline of when you go fast . . . I sort of encourage my dad. I tell him to go for it. If I was driving, I wouldn't do it. The car he's got and the car I would have are different. I'll have a little thing.' [M, 16]

As the last quotation indicates, those who enjoy speed may recognise that it will not be appropriate for them to drive too fast when they start driving – even if it is (as in this instance) only on the grounds that it is the car, and not the competence levels, that is different. For some of those we met, especially in the younger-age groups, driving fast was the thing that they most looked forward to about passing the test:

‘I’m looking forward to the different cars that I can drive – fast ones.
Favourite car: Porsche.’ [M, 13]

‘I’d like to drive places. Just like to drive. I’d like to be able to drive fast.
Just being able to go wherever you want, on the motorway and stuff.’
[M, 13]

‘I can’t wait to start. I just want to go fast.’ [M, 13]

Even these young people, however, tended to recognise a tension between their wish and safety:

Question: ‘How do you know he [mate] is good?’
‘The speed he drives. He’s fast on the roads. In the car I feel safe even though he’s quite fast. I like being in the car more with him than my mum, because she’s like too slow.’

Question: ‘Are they as safe as each other?’

‘He’s not really safe, but I quite like the way he drives because it’s faster and gets you there quicker. My mum’s safer.’

Question: ‘Do you worry about the risks?’

‘No.’

Question: ‘Why not?’

‘I don’t know.’

Question: ‘Is there a chance he’ll crash when you’re in the car?’

‘Yes.’

Question: ‘Would you like to drive like [mate]?’

‘A bit. I’d like speed from [mate] and safety from mum.’ [M, 15]

The challenge for these young drivers is that driving slowly can get boring:

‘My Grandma’s a good driver because she’s slow and careful. Really slow. She makes sure she keeps under the speed limit.’

Question: ‘How do you know?’

‘Because she tells me. She’s like, I don’t know . . . always looking round at other cars and stuff.’

Question: ‘How do you feel in the car with her?’

‘Bored. Because she’s too slow.’ [M, 13]

This is important. It is too easy to characterise adrenaline as some kind of potent narcotic: the expression ‘thrill-seeking’, for instance, suggests an individual actively seeking out new and more exciting experiences. This may be true for some young drivers, but the accounts offered by participants in this research suggest something altogether more mundane – risk-taking as a way of breaking up the boredom of staying within one’s limits:

‘A month ago, we [speaker and a friend] went to Tesco and he drove over the hedge. Not cos it was too fast. It’s just stupid, simple mistakes. I don’t know why. He wrote the first car off. It was carelessness. He said before he passed “I’ll go by the law”, but the freedom took over and he doesn’t.’
[M, 18, Delayer]

Question: ‘Will you be tempted then?’
‘Definitely. I’ll definitely put my foot down.’ [M, 18, Delayer]

‘At times I’ll be pretty good, then I’ll have moments of madness when I’ll put my foot down. For the first couple of months I think I’ll just get bored of toddling along, put my foot down for a couple of hundred metres. But I’ll obviously grow out of that. I can see myself just being stupid – though I’m not going to drive round all the time with my foot to the floor. I can see myself just doing it and getting caught out a couple of times by a few speed cameras hidden away.’ [M, 18, Learner]

The kind of stupidity described by the last speaker is not that far away (structurally, if not statistically) from the stupidity that leads millions of us to buy National Lottery Tickets every week. In the latter case, a relatively small amount of certain pain (the cost of a ticket) is accepted in exchange for the small chance of a very large amount of pleasure. In driving, the small chance of a very large amount of pain is accepted in exchange for a relatively small amount of certain pleasure.

2.5 Summary

In our earlier research with 17–25-year-old drivers (Christmas, 2007), we found that participants defined good driving as the mastery of three different and parallel kinds of activity, which we called the physical, social and emotional activities of driving. In this research, we found that the definitions of good driving offered by young pre-drivers and learners included many references to the physical activity (especially control and awareness) and emotional activity (especially staying calm). However, on further probing, some of these definitions turned out to be problematic and, in particular, many participants identified control with being able to drive fast.

Unlike the young drivers in the earlier research, there were almost no references to the social activity of driving or to the need to be patient and considerate with other drivers. On the other hand, the young pre-drivers and learners were far more likely

to mention consideration for passengers as a feature of good driving – for instance, checking that passengers are wearing seat belts.

Pre-drivers' and learners' judgements that someone is a good driver are largely based on the fact that one feels safe in the car with them. The evidence suggests that this feeling of safety is not based on a cognitive assessment of the driver's behaviour, but is an affective reaction to messages projected by the driver through their behaviour. Three types of message in particular seem to have a positive impact on the feeling of safety:

- confidence – I am able to deal with this situation;
- concern – I am looking after you (the passenger); and
- superiority – I am better than other drivers.

Analysis of these messages reveals some potential sources for patterns identified in our previous research. The reliance of young drivers on confidence as a measure of ability and the 'talent' model appear to develop from the way in which confidence messages create a feeling of safety. Also, the projection of superiority may explain why young drivers are broadly forgiving of a tendency to aggression in their own behaviour.

The context for all of this is the 'double insulation' of young passengers, who are cut off from other drivers not just by the 'bubble' of the car but also by the fact that someone else is driving. Where that other person draws the passengers' attention to other drivers, it is as complex (and annoying) physical obstacles, not as people sharing a common space. This helps to explain why the social activity of driving is largely absent from the accounts of good driving offered by pre-drivers and learners.

Further research would be valuable to establish exactly how and when the social activity of driving rises to prominence in the mind of the young pre-driver/learner/driver. However, this research strongly suggests that this depends on the disruption of the social space within the car, and, in particular, the 'safe' relationship between parent and child. The presence of an ADI in the car helps to preserve this social space – making the critical breakpoint the moment after the test when a young person first drives on their own.

This account may also help to explain why 'delayers' (young people who delay starting to learn to drive) are more likely to mention the social activity of driving. This group are more likely to have been driven by their peers, and the experience of being driven by a very confident but clearly incompetent peer may disrupt the critical link between projected confidence and feeling safe.

The importance of the moment one drives on one's own also sheds new light on the finding from our previous research that young drivers typically believe that the

social activity of driving is not covered by the formal learning process, and that one only starts learning to drive after passing. It may be that many young people are only receptive to learning about the social activity of driving after they have driven on their own, i.e. after they have passed.

Participants in this research were clear that good driving is not just about what you do, but also about what you do not do. In particular, it is important to resist two types of 'temptation' when one starts driving. The first of these is peer pressure. Strikingly, peer pressure seems to work only one way – to make driving worse, not better – with a number of young people telling us that their efforts to make friends drive more safely did not work. A potential mindset difference is apparent here, with some young drivers seeking to project messages of confidence and superiority (so ignoring requests to drive more safely), and others seeking to project messages of concern for passengers (so taking heed of them).

The second temptation is adrenaline – especially for those young drivers who have been driven fast by a driver who nevertheless projects confidence and makes them feel safe. However, this kind of behaviour is not necessarily 'thrill-seeking' in the full sense of the term. Instead, a number of participants described putting one's foot down from time to time as a kind of boredom alleviation.

3 GOOD LEARNERS

The period between starting (formally) to learn to drive and passing the test is, uncontroversially, a critical one in the development of driving ability. For many young people, this may be the only significant formal input they receive on their capabilities and attitudes as a driver:

‘Well I suppose as soon as you’ve passed your test, you’ve passed your test – you are legal aren’t you, so off you go. It’s wrong really.’ [Mother of M, 14]

The attitude of a young person during that period is therefore a critical variable in their future behaviour as a driver. In this section, we consider the question: what makes a good learner? In particular, we explore two critical dimensions in the attitudes of learners which the evidence shows have a crucial impact:

- how **concerned** the learner is about their readiness to pass the test; and
- how **impatient** the learner is to pass the test.

3.1 Concern about readiness to pass

From the perspective of advanced driving instructors (ADIs), the best learners are – perhaps unsurprisingly – those who are willing to accept criticism:

‘A readiness to listen, first and foremost, and a readiness to not curse their own mistakes, but to learn from their mistakes. To accept, and some people do find it hard to accept, that you do make mistakes when you’re learning. I tend to find I’m more tolerant, more accepting of mistakes, than my pupils are.’ [ADI]

Some learners also recognise the importance of this willingness to listen:

‘You’ve got to show you’re willing to learn and accept criticism.’ [F, 16]

The testimony of ADIs, however, shows that some learners come to lessons with a very different attitude:

‘I had a guy last year and I picked him up and he’d had 36 lessons previously, which is a reasonable amount of lessons, with a large driving school . . . So he came to me and he basically sort of said, I need to pass my test, which sort of set alarm bells ringing but I said, right, okay, fine, now I need to assess you. I need to see how your driving is so that I can see where we need to go . . . So he’s got in the car, immediately just took off without looking round, and first of all when it came to it he did that,

right, and I thought, right, okay. Pulled him up immediately, stopped, pulled over. And I said, did your instructor teach you to drive like that? No, he didn't. Right, so where did this come from then? Oh, I've been driving my mates. No, not good. So then what we've got to do is unravel what he thinks he's learnt and basically he hasn't learnt anything. All they've done is let him drive. So, firstly it's his attitude, because he thinks he knows how to drive already. He knows how to move the vehicle, he doesn't know how to drive.' [ADI]

The link made in this last quotation between a know-it-all attitude and previous experience of driving with mates was echoed by other ADIs and parents:

'He looks like someone that's driven a car before, just with his mates and whatever, "oh, I've done a bit, I can drive". You get no end of people . . . how many people ring up and say to you, "oh, yes, I can drive, I just want to cut the lessons and take my test". And they get in the car and they're crap.' [ADI]

Question: 'You said that you try [to talk about driving in the car] with your son, and that he won't have it. Why is that?'

'I think it's because the majority of his friends have already passed, and they all know best, and he goes out with them in their cars . . . He thinks he knows better.' [Mother of M, 19, Learner]

So what factors contribute to a learner's willingness to listen? One of the key dimensions of difference is the size and significance of the gap they see between their current level of ability and the level of ability required in order to be a good driver, and their resulting level of **concern** that the learner feels about their readiness to pass.

Young people see this gap as smaller or larger depending on where they place its two ends. At one end of the gap, young people have differing perspectives on the seriousness of the activity of driving. A few young people take it seriously because they are clear about the scale of consequences attached to bad driving:

'I'm nervous about being in control. Other people are affected.' [F, 14]

'There aren't many things I do at the moment that could put people's lives at risk.' [F, 14]

Although this point of view was more common among the parents who participated in our research:

'I'd worry myself sick, to be fair, and I will do when he starts driving – you are just replacing one thing with another, aren't you? Absolutely worried sick when he starts driving, even though he's a sensible child.'

Even when he goes on his bike I worry. Basically you are sticking him in a lethal weapon and I will be worried sick.' [Mother of M, 13]

Other young people treat driving seriously because they see passing the test as an achievement of which they can be proud:

'She [character created in workshop] can't wait until she passes her driving test. She's proud that she will pass, proud of driving.' [F, 13]

'The main thing [I am looking forward to] is to see how happy she's going to be about the fact she's achieved something. Because, obviously, it's a lot harder now to pass your driving test and there's quite a lot of pressure on them I think, when they're going through it. And I think that when she does finally do it, it will be enough to see that she has achieved.' [Mother of F, 16]

Other young people take a much less serious view on driving:

'[Sometimes you think] this person's going to listen to what I'm going to say to them, and take it in, whereas other people come out and you can sometimes think: they're only here to get a licence as soon as they can so they can start larking about in a car.' [ADI]

In particular, this lack of seriousness may attach itself to the driving test which, as was shown in our previous research, suffers from a generally low level of credibility among young people:

'I've had one test. It went wrong, just a stupid mistake. It's just getting all the silly things right for me at the moment. It was a lack of concentration and things really on my test. My mind just wanders. I see someone walking down the road . . . ' [M, 19, Learner]

'The difference with teaching [a guy I have been teaching] is that he is: "I've got my licence now, it is wonderful". When he finished I said, "good, you made it, you got 14 points, and you need 15 to fail. You got 14. Do you realise that you just made it?" "But I can drive, it doesn't matter how many points I got. The main thing is, I've got my licence and I can drive." I said, "But you don't know all the rules so be careful". "It doesn't matter, I'm on the road, I can do what I want now. All these rules you're telling me about, spinning the wheel, holding the wheel one way, change it, doesn't matter, you don't have to drive like that, because you're an instructor who is telling me to do that but really, no. Once I can control a car I don't have to do any of that any more, and there's nobody to tell me that I can't, because I have a licence.'" [ADI]

At the other end of the gap, young people feel nervous about their own capability to learn to drive. A number of the younger pre-drivers in particular described this feeling of nervousness in talking about the characters they had created in workshops:

‘She’s not looking forward to learning. She wants to drive, but she’s not sure she’ll be able to because she’s lost all her confidence.’ [M, 13]

‘His mum died in a car crash three years ago. His dad doesn’t care if he gets into trouble. He’s looking forward, but nervous about driving because of what happened.’ [M, 13]

‘She’s nervous about driving because she’s seen people crash and she doesn’t want to crash.’ [M, 13]

‘She’s scared about learning, doesn’t think she’ll be able to do it very easily. Because of like the way that her friends drive and stuff. And her mum. Her mum doesn’t like driving very much, she’s anxious.’ [M, 16]

‘She’s excited about driving herself, but she’s quite small. She feels she might not be able to reach the pedals.’ [F, 14]

As we saw in Section 2.3, however, this nervousness can rapidly fade when young people experience the first flush of being able to master steering and gears:

‘I’ll be safe but confident. Because I’ve had a go in cars before and that. I feel like I know what I’m doing. I don’t, but I feel like I will.’ [F, 16]

It may be further weakened by versions of what we described in our previous research (Christmas, 2007) as the talent model (a belief that driving ability is (at least in part) a matter of natural talent, rather than something that needs to be developed through experience):

‘If you’re a natural, you can drive straightaway.’ [M, 14]

‘He’s very confident because he thinks driving’s like easy.’ [M, 13]

Young people vary in their level of **concern** about their readiness to pass, and this has a clear impact on their willingness to listen and invest in the learning process. But this is not the only important dimension of difference between young people indicated by the evidence from this research. Young people also vary in their level of **impatience** to pass.

3.2 Impatience to pass

The moment of passing the test is a critical point in the life of a young person, bringing with it significant new freedoms: freedom from reliance on other people and other modes of transport, and the inconvenience and cost they entail:

‘Be able to go where I want to, without having to ask parents.’ [M, 13]

‘Not having to ask my parents to take me places and wait for them to finish what they’re doing.’ [F, 14]

‘No more cycling when I pass.’ [M, 15]

‘Not having to get the bus. It’s quite expensive to get the bus into town.’ [F, 14]

‘The thing that I’m looking forward to the most is not getting on the bus. The people on the bus, it’s full of . . . stinks. The buses stink. If you’re going in rush hour and you’re coming back from work then it stinks, and there’s a stench. Loads of school kids. I hate buses.’ [M, 16]

‘When I pass, it will save me a lot of money in taxis, buses and stuff, getting to work.’ [M, 19, Learner]

Freedom to do more things with friends:

‘Get as many of my mates in my car and go out somewhere. I don’t know. Better than the park.’ [M, 15]

‘Driving means you can take your friends out on a Friday night to Bristol. I don’t go out there at the moment.’ [M, 15]

‘When I drive, I’m going to have more time to spend with my friends, and by myself as well. When you’re bored at home, you can’t exactly go out for a walk when it’s raining.’ [F, 15]

‘When I pass my test, I’ll probably spend a lot of time in it with my friends. You can go further. You’re not limited. You can go on holiday.’ [F, 16]

Also, freedom to go to new places and do new things:

‘Add variety to what you can do. Better opportunities. See more things which you can’t see around here.’ [M, 18, Learner]

‘Having the freedom of getting around, going where you want to, football matches and stuff.’ [M, 15]

‘It will be really useful because when you’re 18 you can drive to university and commute to different places in the UK.’ [F, 13]

‘I want a car cos I want to go round the world. I’ve heard of people doing it. I just want to see what it’s like.’ [M, 13]

For many young people, driving also marks a critical point of transition into the adult world:

‘[When she started] she felt nervous but really excited about driving: she could help out mum and dad by driving.’ [F, 13]

‘I’ll be excited. When you start to learn, you’re getting older. It’s one of them things you’re allowed to do at a certain age.’ [F, 14]

‘I think driving gives you more responsibility. That’s a good thing. Then more people can trust you.’ [M, 15]

This ‘right of passage’ quality of passing the test was something that parents and ADIs also commented on:

‘It’s quite a major thing isn’t it? It’s like getting married, and moving into your first home and stuff like that. Learning how to drive is a very big thing, it’s a major part of your life, isn’t it?’ [ADI]

‘It seems to be your first real achievement as an adult. There’s a lot of pressure on you at that age. It’s something you know you’ve got to do to give you the freedom to get jobs, to travel, to whatever. When you pass, it’s an amazing feeling. It’s one of the best things in the world, isn’t it? At the time, it’s just great.’ [Father of M, 16]

Given all this, it is not surprising that many of the young people we met were impatient to pass the test and to start driving. This sense of impatience can, for some young people, be strengthened by the sense that driving – especially driving fast – will be fun (see Section 2.4.2 for some other examples of this) or by a desire to keep up with peers who have already passed:

‘... I keep a very tight rein on pupils who, if they’re coming into this because I want to drive, because all my mates drive. Because the first question I ask of people when they get in is, why do you want to learn to drive? And if that’s the answer that comes back, that does ring an alarm bell, I think, rather as was being said. I don’t let people like this go too

fast, I don't let people like this be reckless in my car, risking their life, my life, and other people's lives. My concern would be what happens after they've finished.' [ADI]

'When they're learning they do pick it up, they do ask the questions, sometimes, but they are only young lads whose sole motivation in life, up until that point, is to pass their driving test, basically, and nothing else. They want to pass their driving test so they can cruise around town, they can drive their girlfriends around and stuff like that, or get in the back of the cars with their mates.' [ADI]

Given that the number of lessons and tests taken to pass are commonly used by young people as points of comparison, some parents noted that peer (or sibling) comparison can also encourage a form of 'competitive impatience' to pass:

'They take the mickey out of each other, like one of them failed the theory twice, so they said, "oh, fancy failing that".' [Father of M, 18, Learner]

'I'll do it in 10 lessons and that sort of thing; I'll pass first time, etc.' [Father of M, 19, Learner]

'I don't know whether it's a boy thing, but he can't wait to have his little boy racer car and beating his brothers and making sure that he passes his test before his brother is taking it . . . all that sort of thing.' [Mother of M, 17, Learner]

The cost and expense of lessons can have a similar impact, especially on those whose parents are not paying for lessons:

'If lessons were cheaper, more people would take more lessons.' [M, 18, Learner]

'Lessons are quite expensive. You can't afford to have loads in a week. If you're only working part-time, half your wages are gone.' [F, 17, Learner]

'If you go to your lower-class families, obviously money is a problem, and they want to get there as soon as possible. [In richer families] the parents often even pay. You get a cheque for your 10 hours with mum and dad's name on it, and they come out with it in their pocket, whereas again, not your lower class . . . they pay weekly, cash, because they're all working and they haven't got the backing of the family for learning to drive.' [ADI]

Through a combination of their differing levels of motivation for the outcomes of passing and differing degrees of tolerance for the process of learning, young people vary in their level of **impatience** to pass. Some young people, it is worth noting,

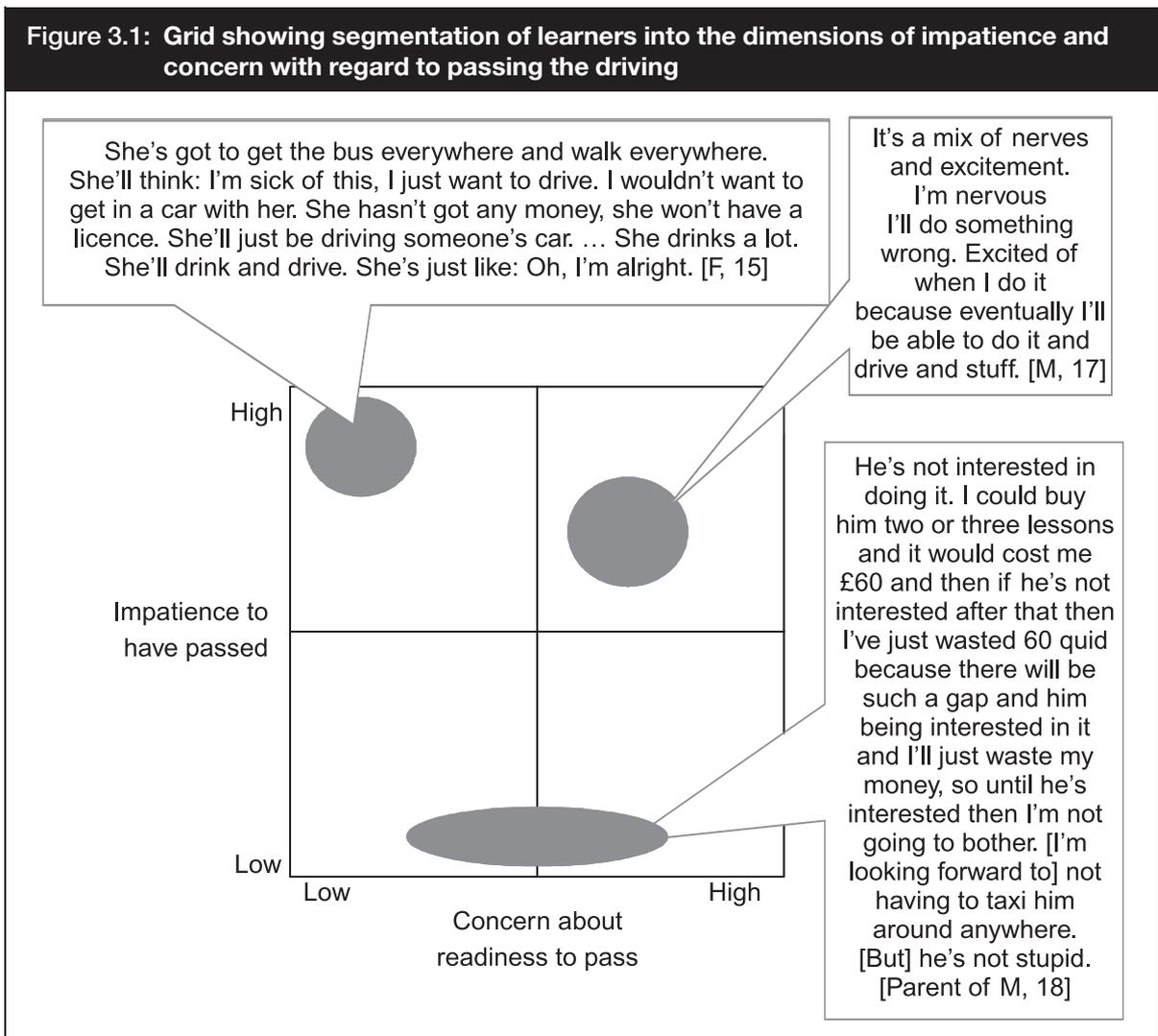
show very little impatience at all – so little impatience, indeed, that they do not even start driving.

3.3 A simple segmentation of learners

In this section we have described two key dimensions of difference between young learners that, between them, determine the way in which those young learners will engage with the pre-test learning process. Combining these dimensions, we can create a simple grid onto which young learners can be plotted. Figure 3.1 illustrates this simple grid with some quotations taken from our research.

Of all the different permutations of learner, it is – not surprisingly – those in the top left-hand corner of this grid whom ADIs most dread:

‘He wants to drive because everybody drives. It’s great, it’s fun on the road, it’s like the stunt man who decides, everybody is a stunt man, why can’t I be a stunt man, I want to do it, I can do it.’ [ADI]



‘His attitude to driving, I would characterise as being, it’s great fun, it’s great to have some power, the power of controlling a vehicle. It’s great to have some independence, I don’t have to get a lift off my mum, I don’t have to get the bus. But there isn’t really a deep seated awareness of just how bloody dangerous driving is.’ [ADI]

A number of participants in ADI workshops commented that drivers such as these can ‘play the system’, doing as they are told in lessons and in the test purely to speed up the process of getting a licence:

‘You can see through the veil that they’re trying to put an act on, for the test. Doesn’t matter what you try and tell them, you must do this to remain safe, yeah, yeah, and they’re just working to a format, to pass the test, and you know full well that some of them, after they’ve passed the test are just going to do whatever they like . . . There’s no follow up after the test. There’s no checks. They know that.’ [ADI]

‘So they’ll go by the book, they’ll learn everything by the book. You might have to slow them down one day and say, why are you driving so fast all of a sudden? Because they pick up bad habits from sitting in the passenger seat of their mates’ cars and things like that, but you know they’re going to be like their mates as soon as they pass their driving test . . . This lad, he’ll learn quite quickly, he’ll get through his test. But you know that after he’s passed his driving test he’s not going to feed the wheel, he’s not going to do the push, pull thing.’ [ADI]

‘He will probably be really good to talk to, get through his test and then like most young kids these days, will try and push their luck, and they’ve got their licence. It’s human nature. There’s no magic way of stopping that bad boy. They will all try and push the limit and they’ll push themselves far enough that they will crash.’ [ADI]

A few of the young people noted similar patterns in the behaviour of their peers:

‘I know people that have been drivers from a young age, because they’ve got experience in cars, they take lessons, drive normal in the exam – then drive like idiots.’ [F, 17, Delayer]

3.4 Summary

The attitude of a young person during the period of formal learning is a critical variable in their future behaviour as a driver. Two dimensions were identified which determine how good a learner will be.

On the one hand, the level of **concern** a learner feels about their readiness to pass will impact on their willingness to take criticism and listen. A young person's concern may be increased either because they have a higher estimation of the potential consequences of bad driving or because they have a lower estimation of their own current capability.

On the other hand, the level of **impatience** a learner feels to pass – and to be out on the road driving – will influence the way in which they engage with the learning process. Many (though not all) young people are impatient for the freedom that driving is perceived to bring, with a much smaller number also being impatient for the experience itself. Impatience can be increased by competition with peers or siblings (to pass first, in fewer lessons, etc.) and by the practical costs (money, time) of the learning process.

Taken together, these two dimensions define a simple grid onto which young learners can be plotted. Learners with a very low level of concern and high level of impatience provide the greatest cause for concern. Some of these may 'play the system', doing as they are told in lessons and in the test purely to speed up the process of getting a licence.

4 GOOD LEARNING

According to the participants in this research, learning to drive has two basic elements to it. On the one hand, learning to drive is about mastering the physical, emotional and social activities of driving – although, as we have seen in Section 2.1, many pre-drivers and learners place little, if any, emphasis on the last of these. On the other hand, it is about getting the right attitude – both to driving (so that one can resist the temptations described in Section 2.4) and to learning (as discussed in Section 3). The sections that follow explore these two aspects of learning in more detail and, in particular, the critical role played by experience in each.

4.1 Mastering the activity of driving

There was widespread agreement among the young people taking part in this research that experience is critical to mastering the activity of driving – with a number identifying off-road experience as an important first step in learning to drive, and others suggesting modular approaches which allowed the learner to increase the level of driving challenges in stages:

‘Another thing that would be good is practising on private land. Because on private land you can’t get into trouble for anything you do, and it’s open space, so you can’t crash into things.’ [M, 15]

‘Different tests for motorways and certain other places, so you don’t have to take the whole test again. You would have to take all the modules before driving, but then you could do the ones you’re good at first.’ [F, 20, Learner; F, 17, Learner (working in a pair)]

A number of participants felt that relevant experience could include watching other people driving:

‘I think it would be good to get in the car while watching other drivers, and like see everything there. When you’re like normally in the car you don’t normally focus on the driver. This way you’d get a first-hand view.’ [M, 15]

Question: ‘What sort of things could help you learn?’

‘Watching their mates driving.’ [F, 15]

‘Watching other drivers.’ [M, 16]

‘And more experienced drivers like your parents.’ [M, 15]

A few young people claimed that they actually used the regular opportunities they had to do this when sitting in the passenger seat:

‘You know, when someone’s driving, you’re curious, just watching them, so you watch the way their feet go, pushing down the pedals, and you watch the clutch and you watch the gears. You watch what side they’re observing. Everything I know I’ve picked up off him.’ [M, 16]

‘I watch my dad all the time. Even if you’re bored in the car it’s something to do.’ [M, 16]

‘My mum makes me watch when to change gear and stuff. I’m learning something from it though. It depends if I’m in the mood – it can be irritating.’ [M, 17, Delayer]

In contrast to this general enthusiasm for experiential learning, a number of participants were sceptical about the **theory** side of the test:

‘You could just read the *Highway Code* to try and show you’re a good driver.’ [M, 13]

‘But you could have no confidence at all.’ [M, 13]

‘Nowadays it’s all about theory work rather than going out and driving. Like you can know the *Highway Code* and not be a good driver. Someone can drive well but if they’re not clever enough to pass the theory test, surely it’s more important to have better safe drivers on the road than people who can tell you about how to drive?’ [M, 14]

‘They can’t make the driving test any tougher! If they made it more practical and relevant that would make sense!’ [M, 18, Learner; M, 20, Learner (working in a pair)]

Some participants felt that learning about driving, including the theory test, could be a popular option in schools:

‘I think people would find it – not exciting, but vaguely interesting, because it’s like towards adulthood, vaguely older.’ [F, 14]

‘In school it would be one of the coolest things you could take.’ [F, 19, Learner]

However, in some cases, at least, this seems to have been linked to a desire to get the theory test out of the way as early as possible:

‘You should take your theory test in schools, so you’ve got more of an open opportunity, and you can take it again after school.’ [M, 15; M, 16 (working in a pair)]

A number of young people expressed concern about whether people really get enough experience before they take their tests:

‘My friend passed his test after eight or nine lessons, and he passed first time. And I think it was three weeks after that he wrote his car off. He’s a terrible driver and he passed. I think it’s basically luck on the day.’ [F, 16]

‘You get better after the test. You have more experience when you’ve been driving for a while, so like you’re not going to be that good, even if you concentrate.’ [F, 15]

This concern was echoed by parents and ADIs:

‘I think driving lessons should be made to last longer, not a quick fix in a week, because you can’t learn to drive in a week, I don’t care what anyone says. You might cross the Ts and dot the Is but you cannot drive the car in a week. And it ought to be mandatory that driving takes a longer time, say over a year to learn to drive and you have to have so many lessons in that year. Now it’s going to come back to people can’t afford it but I think insurance companies ought to contribute towards it, I really do.’ [Father of F, 17, Learner]

‘Have a certain number of lessons like pilots. Some pass their test at six lessons, which isn’t enough really, so if they had a set number of lessons as standard, that might help.’ [Mother of M, 20, Learner]

‘Yes, you need a minimum of 30 hours to get a pilot’s licence.’ [Father of F, 17, Learner]

‘I know in Germany you’re not allowed to learn with anybody other than a qualified driver, and you must do at least 40 hours, classroom tuition.’ [ADI]

These concerns were often linked with the kinds of sceptical comment about the test itself, which, in our previous research (Christmas, 2007), were common among young drivers:

‘Sometimes you can pass a driving test without really understanding how to drive the car. Some people can do eight or ten lessons, pass the driving test, they are still not a good driver when they pass their driving tests. I think people pass driving tests who are not good drivers.’ [Father of F, 13]

‘You can take someone who’s not very good at driving; you can go to a test centre; you can drive them round all the roads that are used on the test routes, which are quite easy to find, and you can get that person who probably isn’t as good as you’d want him to be, to get through that test.’

You can get them through that test. You can tell them what gear they need to be in, where to look . . . in other words if someone can absorb the information you can coach them into passing that test. That does not make them a good driver.’ [ADI]

‘I teach my pupils to drive in the real world. I teach them how to pass a test, but I teach them to drive for real. There’s a big difference, because the test is outdated. It really is.’ [ADI]

‘But the great thing about it is that, with my pupils, it’s not just teaching to be able to pass their test, but teaching them to drive. So at the end of it they actually know what they’re doing, they know what the dangers on the road are, they know how to drive, not to just pass the test, which is what most of the people ask me for.’ [ADI]

Question: ‘Does passing your test make you a good driver, in your view?’
‘No, but driving experience does.’ [Mother of M, 19, Learner]

4.2 What role should parents play in helping children master driving?

The young people, ADIs and parents in this research were in near universal agreement that teaching people how to drive should be left to professional instructors. Three types of argument were offered for this preference. The first was that parents’ knowledge of driving is not up to scratch:

‘You need your driving instructor as well because they know exactly what you need to pass.’ [M, 16]

‘If I chose my mum or my dad, I don’t think of them as good drivers. They had their test so many years ago. They tell me to do things and that’s not what I’ve been told. They’ve got the experience – but probably need to brush up.’ [M, 17, Learner]

‘I’m not an instructor. I will probably show him the wrong way to be honest.’ [Father of M, 16]

‘I wouldn’t presume to teach one of my children, because I learnt to drive 30-odd years ago, and I don’t know what the current methods of teaching are.’ [Father of F, 17, Learner]

The nature of the relationship between parent and child was also an issue for a number of participants, and formed the basis for a second type of argument. Young

people, on their side, questioned whether their parents would actually give them the feedback they needed – or, if they did so, whether it would be given constructively:

‘You have honesty. So if it’s your family and friends they might not say you did that wrong because they might feel scared of how you’re going to react. They might feel out of place that they shouldn’t be telling you what to do. So the driving instructor is going to say you’re doing that wrong.’ [F, 16]

‘The instructor shows you and tells you what you’ve done wrong and how you can do it right. But with your parents, they say: “oh, no, you’re doing it wrong, you’re doing it wrong!”’ [F, 15]

‘[My brother] was scared, but his instructor was so good that when he took him to the roundabout he told him everything around it. So he watched for you. Whereas with your mum and dad all they would be scared of is you crashing their car. So basically they love you too much to say that you’re doing it wrong because they don’t want to make you upset.’ [M, 16]

‘I’m alright with my driving instructor. I know he’s got control as well and talks me through everything. But my dad thinks I can do everything and he thinks I should know things, like coming up to this roundabout and lorry on the inside, whether I should stop. He’s been driving for a long time, so he thinks I’ll know, he doesn’t think.’ [F, 17, Learner]

‘When I was 12 I had a few outings with my dad. It wasn’t good. We’re both impatient. He tried to grab the steering wheel, and we were shouting at each other. I hated it anyway!’ [F, 20, Learner]

Parents, for their part, questioned whether their children would actually take feedback from them:

‘You get the arguments when you come back and they will accept it more from a complete stranger.’ [Father of F, 15]

‘I think nowadays, the children are better off going with just an instructor because it’s all crossed messages, isn’t it? Everyone drives differently and if their instructor’s telling them one thing, and then if they’re going out with their dad or mum, there would be a few punch ups as well. They take it from a complete stranger as well. They take the criticism. If someone was going to criticise them and say you’re not even safe to be out on the road yet, or something, you’re going to get the strops and the huffs and puffs. Where, if the instructor was sitting there and saying exactly the same thing, they’d take that on board and they’d work that little bit harder.

Because they don't like to be criticised at that age, do they?' [Mother of F, 16]

Finally, a third class of argument was based on the fact that instructors, unlike parents, have cars with dual controls:

'I don't know how to cope with every situation at the moment, and my instructor, he can take control really quickly.' [F, 17, Learner]

'Well, with my son, I intended to take him out and I didn't because I just didn't think it was right. Again, they could be the best driver in the world, you've got no dual controls or anything in the car, so if something pulls out, they might just panic. So I think it's best to just let them go out with an instructor, you're paying the money so they can teach them.' [Father of F, 15]

'At the moment she's not had many lessons so I don't feel confident to sit beside her . . . It's just me not feeling that my reactions would be quick enough if she got into a difficult situation, to pull the handbrake up.' [Mother of F, 17, Learner]

'It [driving with parents] should be stopped. What have they got to stop somebody that's coming out of a junction? A handbrake, which is not of use. It needs to be stopped. It is lethal.' [ADI]

Only the last of these third classes of argument is obviously an argument against supervised practice. ADIs themselves were not in agreement about whether or not supervised practice was a good idea:

'What I tend to do is I encourage my pupils, if they can, to have private lessons with their parents etc. . . . The reason I encourage that is the pupils that I take to tests that have had private lessons are infinitely better, because they've had a lot more experience and in their mind it's not a financial burden . . .' [ADI]

'I'm totally against the gentleman there, with the practice with other people, because when you teach something you see what your daddy's doing, your mummy's doing, why can't I do it?' [ADI]

Parents themselves took different lines on whether or not they wanted to get involved in supervised practice:

'I just give them experience. The more experience really, maybe learning to drive, but I take them out as well on the road.' [Father of F, 17, Learner]

‘I’d do the supervised practice, because my mum did it for me, and I passed my test a lot quicker because she took me out.’ [Mother of M, 13]

‘I want nothing to do with it whatsoever. That’s what you pay a driving instructor for, because I think you get into so many arguments and bad habits. I don’t want anything to do with it.’ [Mother of M, 13]

‘It depends on . . . some kids don’t want their parents along. It all depends on the individual child.’ [Father of F, 13]

The point was made by parents, ADIs and young people alike that better communication between them could be important to making a success of supervised practice – though comments were made that both parents and ADIs felt that it was up to the other party to make more of an effort in this respect:

‘We also wanted to take some advice [from the instructor], and not just be judgemental when [our children] were out with us, but to share the responsibility – and with the new drivers themselves, and with the professionals, because we felt it was easy for us to be out with them, and to be picking up the bad points, when, in actual fact, we should be communicating more and [having] ongoing communicat[ion] with the professional driving instructor, and with the young driver themselves.’ [Mother of M, 19, Learner]

‘We go to parent’s evening for our children at school, it should be treated the same, because this is important now, because they’re on the road, on their own, so there should be the opportunity where parents or whoever’s paying who’s interested in the child, should see the instructor at some stage, or a progress report.’ [Mother of M, 19, Learner]

‘It’s just so nice sometimes when mum comes out to the door: “Oh, we just want to have a look at you. And she’ll be all right with you, won’t she, and you’ll bring her home in one piece”, and whatever, and it’s just nice, because then you feel that you could approach the parents as well. You know, we’re not getting on very well or whatever, because of this, because of that. I’ve set her some homework, or whatever. Could you just make sure she’s got it ready for next week. But no-one wants to put any effort in, do they? No-one puts any interest into it. They just want to pay the money and you’ve got to do all the work. Just get me through the test.’ [ADI]

‘I think more communication between the instructors and the other people that you learn to drive with. More joined up, sharing tips. At the moment it’s a bit disjointed.’ [M, 17 Learner]

However, there is an additional challenge here. Frequently, parents are not only acting as supports to the learning process: they are also **paying clients**. This can produce a tension between the desire to ensure that young people get the right amount of experience (analogous with a learner's concern about readiness to pass the test in Section 3.1) and the desire to ensure value for money (analogous with a learner's impatience to pass the test in Section 3.2). The fact that money changes hands can lead to scepticism about the motives and/or capabilities of ADIs when the learning process is felt to have gone on a little too long:

'My instructor's milked me for money, definitely.' [F, 18, Learner]

'They think you're not teaching them right, or they've had enough lessons now, they should be making more progress than they actually are, that sort of thing.' [ADI]

The lack of any independent measure of how well one is doing can add to the need felt to take on this client role. Young people and their parents can lack confidence about whether their ADIs judgement of their competence is actually trustworthy:

'If there was a massive standardisation of the quality of driving instructors then they could tell you when you're ready.' [M, 18, Learner; M, 20, Learner (working in a pair)]

This can lead to an entirely different kind of conversation to the ones outlined above:

'We felt that he wasn't pushing Sarah as well as he should be. He treats everybody perhaps on the same level and not everybody's on the same level. Each pupil is different, and we felt that she could have taken her lessons say before Christmas, because her manoeuvres were perfect and everything, and I just don't know what happened and I think his sort of not being confident in her has rubbed off onto her a little bit.' [Mother of F, 18, Learner]

'Their parents probably took their tests 20 or 30 years ago, probably more than that, they might have only taken six or seven lessons, or 10 lessons, to pass their test, and they just can't see why it takes 50, 60, 70, 100 lessons to get to that standard.' [ADI]

4.3 Experience and attitude

For the young pre-drivers and learners in this research, experience was seen not just as playing a role in mastering the activity of driving but also as the critical step in changing problematic attitudes. A number of young people talked about the need for

concrete and personal experiences if one was to have any real chance of changing attitudes:

‘[Describing an idea for a simulator] You need punishments as well. You’re driving but it’s not real, so if you crash it’s like Game Over. But if you had electric shocks or something.’ [M, 15; M, 15 (working in a pair)]

‘Close encounters [make you a better driver]. Like say one day you come across a roundabout, someone pulls out on you, in time you’ll be thinking that you won’t be as naïve and every time you come to a roundabout you’ll be expecting the person to pull out.’ [M, 16]

A number of young people felt that direct contact with someone else who could talk convincingly about such experiences might be sufficiently emotionally engaging to influence people:

‘If someone had knocked someone over, people our age, it would be the right time to do it, to come and talk about it. Only if they want to, but they can stress how it’s ruined their life.’ [M, 17, Delayer]

‘Maybe talking to someone who’s lost someone and been through it. It might put you off.’ [M, 18, Delayer]

School was also identified as a place where this sort of work on attitudes might sensibly take place:

‘Most people are that eager to learn about cars anyway. Just about safety and everything. It could be compulsory. [You’d need to] have like a model car and stuff, to sit in it and know how to work stuff . . . You could learn if people get angry with you, cut you up and that, how you react and stuff.’ [F, 14; F, 13 (working in a pair)]

‘You get stuff on drugs and alcohol at college, but we’re driving too, and you never hear anything.’ [M, 18, Delayer]

‘We learn careers and citizenship, all about morals. You could be taught something similar to that. You could learn the morals of driving. Moral citizenship.’ [F, 17, Delayer]

Parents also thought that tactics such as those described above might have a chance of success:

‘A good idea would be a support/action group run by, perhaps, ex-offenders that have been involved in car crashes, like you do with drugs. Most of the people who have been involved with those have been ex-

druggies and they're trying to get the kids off it. So if there was some kind of group, similar to what they were saying, that can show crashes . . . Because I think that if you hear it from someone who's actually been there, then they can actually tell them what it did to them emotionally. It would ruin your life, I would imagine.' [Father of F, 15]

'I think really it would be a good idea to put him into a racing thing and let him have an accident where he doesn't really . . . he can find out what the pain is. That might do him a bit more good. They could test him in one of these cars. But that's what happens when you have an accident; it hurts.' [Mother of M, 20, Learner]

A number of parents stated that they themselves had made efforts to raise questions about safety with their children, with varying degrees of success:

'We just talk about . . . when you hear of instances, like, in the village where we are there has been incidences in the past where youths have been killed because they are racing through the village and they ploughed into a lamppost so we would then have the conversation about, you know, it's not clever to drive like that. You don't have to drive at speed to impress people. You don't have to be going through the village and see your mates and think "right, I'll put my foot down now and show them what I can do", and then you end up wrapped around a lamppost. We try and drill that into him, that it's not all about speed. There is more to it than that.' [Mother of M, 13]

'I think I've talked about it because my eldest son is a nightmare and he's a real nightmare because a lot of his friends and people I know have had nasty accidents, people of his age. My son thinks he's the best driver since sliced bread and nothing could ever go wrong. It is a worry and I have witnessed him being absolutely awful. So, yes, we have had those conversations several times.' [Mother of M, 20, Learner]

'My nephew passed last week, and he was driving my brother's car, and he was going mad about it . . . Really speeding. He only passed about two weeks ago, so he was with his mum, and just going mad about it, and she was shouting and screaming.'

Question: 'And did he listen?'

'Boys?' [Mother of M, 16]

Parents also noted the importance of insurance and access to cars as levers with which to influence children's behaviour:

'I took him out. I've got a 1.8 Cabriolet, and my car's not ideal to give him lessons, because it's quite powerful, you can't really see out of the back,

but he's begged me and begged me. My husband's car is a 2.2 GTi something or other, and it's like you said, he thinks he's getting the fastest rocket that's going to get him to Macclesfield and back, and I said "No, it will be a one-litre Corsa or something like that". "Oh, no, no, no." . . . The one thing we have decided is, he will pay for his own insurance . . . It might make him think that bit more if he does have an accident, he will have to pay even more, and I'm adamant that I'm not going to pay that for him, and he's not coming on our insurance either. I know I sound dead hard and dead mean, but as an added [incentive], you know.' [Mother of M, 17, Learner]

'For two years, after you pass your test, [there should be a law that] you are only allowed to drive a one-litre engine, it would slow them down a little bit and peer pressure would be less because everybody of their age would have a one-litre Micra . . . It's like a uniform at school. Nobody queries it because everybody is in the same boat. If, after passing your test, for two years, no matter what age you are, 40 or 50, you have a one-litre engine, the temptation wouldn't be there . . . it's like a uniform at school. Nobody argues with it because they are all the same. So it would be easier as a parent – you can say it's the law.' [Mother of M, 13]

Some parents also expressed the view that more support might be made available to parents seeking to tackle these issues with their children – especially when children actually become involved in dangerous driving:

'There isn't any support, is there, because you wouldn't know where to go, you wouldn't know who to ask, so really I suppose it comes down to once they've passed their test, that they do a group or something . . . You know, how can I slow him down because I fear he's going to crash and die, and they should be able to sort of help more so because they've got the modern . . . they've got them through the driving test, the DVLA, they're big on it, aren't they, because all the driving instructors work for them and everything. I mean I wouldn't know where to go or who to ring if my . . . which he might well do, my real son.' [Mother of M, 13]

' . . . I think if I was really concerned, if I thought that my son was out of control and was driving erratically, I think ultimately I would shop him. If I thought he was doing something that would not only harm himself but harm others, the only people that could tell really would be the police, so you've gone heavy handed with that. There is nothing in between.' [Mother of M, 13]

' . . . Everything's got a sort of help line. Frank for drugs. You've got the network of teachers if they're in trouble for . . . well, you can go to your teacher about anything.' [Mother of M, 13]

‘You could go to your doctor for a lot of things as well, but with driving there’s nowhere . . . you wouldn’t know . . . well, I don’t.’ [Mother of M, 13]

‘And really you’re giving them a loaded weapon aren’t you? There is nothing at all. There’s almost a helpline for absolutely everything you can think of.’ [Mother of M, 13]

‘A couple of weeks ago, it’s a bit embarrassing, my daughter was knocking about with some unruly people, and they were found to be smoking some weed; my daughter wasn’t. Anyway, some of them were arrested, they were only 14 and 15, but to cut a long story short, they sent C home and said go straight home, it was half past seven in the evening, and the policeman rang me up when C came home and said, can I come and see you tomorrow? C had not been taking the drugs, but she was with this gang, and they came round the next day and sat with her for half an hour, and just talked to her like she was a proper person, and just spoke about drugs, and how bad they were for you, and what they did to you etc., and to this day now, C, she’s very, very defiant, but she’s not been near this gang, and she seems to have a lot more respect for the police etc. And I was thinking, why couldn’t the police do something like that, I know mine’s sort of quite a unique situation, but with R [son], there were five young men in that car that crashed because the driver was drinking, and I’m sure some other friends have perhaps had a little bit too much to drink, but the police just sort of sent them home. The young man was sent to the police station, locked up, he walked home at four o’clock in the morning on his own, and the young boy was sentenced six weeks after. There’s been no counselling and R has even said, he felt when the police came round to talk to C about the drugs, he said, now if the police would have come round and had us all together, all five of them, to perhaps go over and say, statistically do you know how many children under the age of 20 have died? You need to use shock tactics I think with this age group anyway that my son is, and I think if they’d been addressed after the incident and perhaps, like you say, somewhere to go, because it definitely did the trick for C and these people, and that’s the only thing I can think of. The situation, it’s all been forgotten now, and nobody spoke to the young lads, they just were interested in getting the driver obviously and taking him away.’ [Mother of M, 17, Learner]

‘If you recognise that there will be some sort of problem like that [attitudinal], then I would say, talk to the driving school and say “Look, this is potentially going to be a problem, have you got an instructor who could deal with that?”’ [Father of F, 17, Learner]

‘There should be more driving schools where there is a selection of instructors where you could find the right one, because there’s not many

places where you could go like that, they're either independent or you don't get to see the instructors.' [Mother of F, 18, Learner]

However, in some cases parents may not actually be aware (or may not choose to acknowledge) that their child's attitudes towards driving are a potential problem:

'I knew my son was going to be a problem driver because he's had that attitude since he was 14. But then very good friends of mine whose son is a year younger, they think he's a little angel and he'd never do anything wrong, would never go over the speed limit. But unfortunately he's one of the worst. So not all parents see it.' [Mother of M, 20, Learner]

ADIs themselves cite the ability to identify the attitude of a young person early on as a critical element of their competence, and adapt their teaching style to that attitude:

'It's an instinct that you develop over a period of time. You can also tell whether they've been driving illegally. Coming up to junctions, exceeding the speed limits, no regard for anything or anyone, and you tame them. There's some people that I've thrown out of the car, and just refused point blank to teach them, because you know at some point they're going to run into somebody, or knock somebody down, and you don't want to be responsible for that.' [ADI]

'If you're picking somebody up that's on that side, then you change the way you teach them. You've got to adapt to them, to get them to adapt to you, then when you've got them going, you start teaching as you normally do.' [ADI]

'It's just the way we read people and deal with it.' [ADI]

For some ADIs, that adaptation of style can include trying to engineer experiences which, while safe, are felt by the learner to be dangerous, precisely in order to bring about shifts in learners' attitudes:

'You know within the limits of safety you can take it to, and if it is in those limits, they can do it.' [ADI]

'You've got to push them a little bit, just to see how far they're going to go. The best lesson I've had this year is when it snowed. First lesson of the morning. They put too much salt down this year. I always go out in the snow. We go sliding, and it is the only place they're going to learn it, on the road, how far is it going to slide, which way is it going to go, how are you going to straighten it up? You can't do that on a road today, but when it is snowing, great stuff.' [ADI]

‘I’ve had a few situations where you’ve brought home what you’re trying to say, like I remember immediately there was a guy who was pulling out from a T junction, he was looking right and edging out over the give way line. There was a car coming from the left which he hasn’t seen, because he was only looking to the right, I leave it till the very last moment and then slam on the brake much harder than I need to; and there was a car coming which he hadn’t seen.’ [ADI]

‘One of the reasons they don’t check the blind spot is when you’re first teaching them to drive and you’re in a quiet area and there’s nothing in the blind spot. They look, they know there’s nothing there, and then they give up. And they think, what’s the point of me looking there? So you take them somewhere where there’s a junction just back, and you pull them over on the left, by that lamppost, and then you wait and you wait. And then you say, right, okay, when it’s safe, pull away. And then you see the car come down . . . and you have to lead them into the problem, sometimes it’s like banging their head on a wall.’ [ADI]

However, there are clear limits on what ADIs can achieve here – reflecting the fact that, ultimately, they cannot really put their learners at risk:

‘I think, for me anyway, there’s a central irony in that. When a young man like this or that one is in the car with an instructor, part of our job, probably you might say the most important part of our job when we’re training people, when we’re teaching people, is to keep them safe, ourselves safe and all other road users safe. That’s why we have dual controls, that’s why we’re taught to intervene at the right time if it becomes necessary. And, for me, as I say, there’s an irony in that, if I teach somebody how to drive to a high standard, we should get through that course of lessons without anything dangerous happening, really . . . So they can learn, theoretically, of the kind of risks that they pose to others, but they probably will not have actually been through it themselves. And, my God, if you ever actually pulled out on a motorway slip road and joined traffic at 70 mph, and not checked a blind spot, and suddenly found that you’re about to smack into the side of somebody you haven’t seen, which was something that happened to me as a new driver, you don’t forget it. And you learn from something like that. So the point I’m trying to make is that, in terms of influencing the attitude, we can sit and talk until we are blue in the face about how potentially dangerous something a pupil does is, and I still have that nagging anxiety at the back of my mind about people like him [example of a learner with a bad attitude]. Has he really learned the lesson? . . . I would never, ever, ever, and I’m sure my colleagues would agree with this, deliberately put anybody in a position where I know they’re going to get frightened. Because, for one thing, it’s just completely irresponsible, because if they make a mistake and there

could be consequences for other people. But fear in some ways, as I said, ironically, fear can be a very good teacher, there's no doubt.' [ADI]

The young people too recognised the limits of any kind of simulated experience from which risk, and therefore fear, has been removed:

'You have to do an emergency stop. But, in reality, you never know when it's coming. I'd stop a lot quicker if it was a child or a car. In the test, you're prepared for it.' [M, 17, Delayer]

'For some people, they need to make their own mistakes before they learn.' [F, 18, Delayer]

'You could have a crash simulator. Before being in a car crash, I thought it'd be good to have freedom, but being in a crash opened my eyes. Throw people about a bit, give them a bit of whiplash, might just make them think. But you can't simulate losing a family member.' [M, 17, Delayer]

Those young people who had themselves experienced the real thing and not simulations were clear about the impacts it had had on their own attitudes and confidence levels:

'I've lost family members through other people. I wouldn't put myself or other people at risk. I would rather stay safe.' [F, 17, Delayer]

'I get panic attacks on motorways. I got into a crash with my dad when I was young. My dad got caught doing 160. He's got an extremely fast car, an Aston Martin and a few Jags and everything. I shout at my brother sometimes if he goes too fast . . . [The accident] had a big impact on me. I was only 3 or 4 at the time. Now I'm driving, it makes me feel I should be more responsible.' [M, 17, Learner]

'My friends died when driving. Before I was thinking: yeah, I'm going to be mad. They were going 115 when they died, all three of them. I was just thinking, it's not just your own life at risk it's other people as well. It shouldn't have had to happen the way it did to make me realise, but it's life. That will stay with me.' [M, 19, Learner]

However, they also told stories about people for whom such experiences had had no impact whatsoever:

'I had a car crash last year. My mate who crashed is a maniac. I said something to him before the crash. He is still driving in the same way, though.' [M, 18, Learner]

‘Having eight points has made no impact on my mate. He’s a typical rebel. He wants to break the rules.’ [M, 17, Delayer]

‘My boyfriend’s lost friends through accidents, but he still drives badly. His dad does too – probably why.’ [F, 17, Delayer]

Question: ‘Has his friends having accidents had any discernible impact, do you think?’

‘On him? I think their attitude as young males is that they see it as “oh, guess what’s happened” and see it as quite funny.’ [Mother of M, 19, Learner]

‘It’s almost a badge of honour.’ [Father of F, 17, Learner]

Even experience, it seems, does not shake the hardest cases, leaving young people and ADIs alike to suggest more punitive approaches for those who refuse to change:

‘After [my friend crashed with me in the car], I wouldn’t get in the car for a month or two. My mate has a scar. But it’s had no impact on him as a driver. Prison is the thing which would change him.’ [M, 18, Learner]

‘I think they should take your licence away for much longer. Like 20 years.’ [M, 20, Learner]

‘For the younger driver, if you speed or break the law, instead of being silly and just having a fine, take the licence off them for a month, and the more they do it, take it off for two months. Everybody needs a car these days, and it is a privilege to have a car, not a right. But that’s the attitude. You’ve got to say: “Okay, you need that car. You’ve done this wrong. We’re taking the car off you for a month. See how you like that. Go onto public transport and see how well you can get to work or not.”’ [ADI]

4.4 Summary

According to the participants in this research, learning to drive has two basic elements: mastering the activity of driving and getting the right attitude.

First hand experience – or experience of watching others drive – was felt to be critical to mastering the activity of driving, with some participants (young people, parents and ADIs) feeling that the current testing regime meant that some learners did not get enough experience before passing. By contrast, many participants were sceptical about the role of ‘theory’.

There was near universal agreement that the teaching of driving should be left to professional instructors on the grounds that:

- parents' knowledge of driving is not up to scratch;
- the instructor–learner relationship is more conducive to feedback and learning than the parent–child relationship; and
- parents, lacking dual controls, are at risk with an inexperienced driver.

There was, by contrast, some debate about the appropriateness and value of supervised practice, with both parents and ADIs disagreeing on this.

A number of parents and ADIs wanted more parent–ADI communication. However, a challenge arises from the fact that parents are both supports to the learning process and paying clients. This can create a tension between the desire to ensure that the young people get the right amount of experience (analogous with a learner's concern about readiness to pass the test) and the desire to ensure value-for-money (analogous with a learner's impatience to pass the test). The latter can create a scepticism about the motives of ADIs among parents and young people, which colours communication between them.

Experience was also felt to be critical to a person adopting the right attitude to being a good learner and driver, with a strong emphasis on the need for concrete and personal experiences in order to change attitudes. Some participants felt that this might include talking to people with experience of crashes.

For their part, parents discussed using insurance payments and car type as possible levers to build their children's responsibility. The view was expressed, however, that parents need more support or guidance in tackling dangerous driving in their children. It was also noted that parents may not know about their children's dangerous driving.

Some ADIs go further, trying to engineer safe situations which nevertheless feel dangerous in order to change the attitudes of the most worrying learners. However, there are clear limits on what they can do – as they cannot actually put anyone at risk. Many young people took the view that simulated risk, from which fear had been removed, could never really change an attitude. Some young people and ADIs also took the view that there is a hardcore of young drivers whose attitudes do not change even if they actually have an accident, and who can only be stopped by more punitive approaches.

5 BETTER DRIVERS

In this and our previous research (Christmas, 2007) we have described a number of patterns of attitude and motivation in young drivers and their origins and influences in pre-drivers and learners. The task in hand, however, is not to describe young drivers but to change them. Too many young people are killed or injured on the road, or kill or injure others. As we noted in the report on our earlier research, the reasons for this disproportionate rate of accident and casualty among young people are complex and very definitely not limited to young people's attitudes and mindsets. It is therefore important that the detailed implications of our findings should be developed by those who are able to balance them against other perspectives, including the more technical aspects of driving capability and road safety. Our research has demonstrated, however, that attitude and mindset are a critical variable in young people's learning and driving behaviour, and that they should therefore be a central consideration for any strategies to improve that learning and driving behaviour – be those communication, learning, testing or enforcement strategies.

Therefore in this section we set out, on the basis of the understanding of attitude and mindset developed in this **and** our previous research:

- some critical challenges facing our current approaches to communication, learning, testing and enforcement;
- some important areas of opportunity; and
- a pragmatic segmentation of young drivers by mindset which might be used to target and tailor ongoing efforts.

5.1 Challenges

Our first phase of research (Christmas, 2007) revealed what might accurately be described as a crisis of credibility facing the current testing and training regime. Indeed, the majority of young drivers we spoke to believe that 'you only **really** learn to drive **after** you have passed the test'. This second phase of research has confirmed that this point of view is shared by pre-drivers and learners: when asked if passing the test made one a good driver, pre-drivers and learners unanimously (and swiftly) answered 'No'.

It is worth noting that the idea of continuing to learn after passing is not **in itself** problematic. In fact, this is exactly what the model of 'lifelong learning' implies. In this model, passing the test provides a foundation for safe driving, but drivers, especially in the novice period, need to continue to practice, reflect on and improve their driving abilities. Unfortunately, our analysis of the attitudes, perceptions and motivations of young drivers, pre-drivers and learners shows that we are a very long way away from the 'lifelong learning' model in most cases. Far from being

perceived as a **foundation** for good driving, the test is perceived by many as a **hoop** to be jumped through; and post-test learning is too often reduced to learning from accidents and near misses.

What is going wrong? Our first phase of research (Christmas, 2007) suggested four critical ‘gaps’ created by current approaches to driver learning and testing, and this second phase of research has reinforced these:

1. **The relevance gap.** Few young people – pre-drivers, learners or novices – see the standards in the test (and other rules of driving) as relevant to ‘real driving’:
 - (a) Young people see the extent to which these standards are flouted by other drivers – including their parents (the models on which many young people seem to base their understanding of good and bad drivers) and, sometimes, their instructors. For many young people, this raises questions about whether these standards are meaningful.
 - (b) The perceived ‘tick-box’ approach to testing, with an emphasis on ‘doing it by the book’, sits uncomfortably with young people’s recognition that good driving is about good situational judgement, and is out of step with the kinds of learning young people are increasingly experiencing in the rest of their lives.
 - (c) The focus of the test on the physical activity of manoeuvring the car safely and anticipating hazards fails to match the **emotionally charged** experience of young novices entering a **social space** shared with other drivers and road users – although, as we have seen in this work, most young people only seem to become fully aware of this mismatch **after** they have passed the test.
 - (d) Taken together, the above issues fuel a perceived contrast between the **law** of the road – at worst, this is seen as a series of pointless bureaucratic restrictions – and the **lore** of the road – the real conventions of good driving as practised.

2. **The measures gap.** The test itself, being a pass/fail hurdle which is widely perceived to lack relevance, is not seen by most young people as a measure of how good a driver one is. This leaves people reaching for measures of ability which are actually counter-productive from a policy point of view – such as how many lessons they take to pass the test. Post-test, without their instructor giving them feedback, young people have no obvious way of measuring their growing (or diminishing) competence as drivers. Most therefore rely on a totally unreliable measure of competence: their own level of confidence. This creates a bizarre situation in which the feeling of confidence serves as a **justification** for feeling confident – a vicious circle of overconfidence which, in some cases, may be brought to a halt only by an accident. The origins of this pattern may lie in pre-test experiences, where young people form opinions of good and bad drivers based not on standards but on their feelings of safety, and the confidence, care and superiority projected by whoever is driving them.

3. **The incentives gap.** For young people who are not highly motivated to improve their driving (perhaps because they believe they have talent or because they simply do not care), there are no real incentives to engage in the learning process beyond the minimum required to pass the test. Indeed, there are number of positive **disincentives**, including the cost of lessons and the fact that passing after fewer lessons is seen by many as evidence of ability. Similarly, there are few meaningful positive incentives to continue improving one's abilities as a driver after the test. Enforcement and communications activity focuses instead on the consequences of getting things wrong – penalties, physical harm or the loss of a no-claims bonus – and so incentivises conformity rather than development. Moreover, the consequences highlighted seem remote and unreal to many young people, especially in comparison to immediate and familiar consequences, such as the impact of their behaviour on peer perceptions. If a young person has a belief in their own innate talent as a driver, they will also discount any risks as 'not applying to me'. Efforts to change the behaviour of young people like these with more and more graphic presentations of the consequences of accidents are unlikely to have much impact, and, at some point, may also risk scaring and alienating those young people who **are** susceptible to this kind of message.
4. **The motivations gap.** Many young people believe that, even without much experience, their driving abilities are already beyond the need for improvement. These young people, who believe that they are **naturally talented** at driving, are the most likely to discard learning from the test, to believe that the safety rationale for rules does not apply to them, and to take risks which are massively beyond their capabilities. The belief in talent is, if anything, amplified by the emphasis on the physical activity of driving in the testing process, and may get an added boost from early success in mastering the physical manipulation of the car in an off-road or other relatively safe environment.

To tackle these gaps and address their role in perpetuating unsafe driving behaviour among young people, we will need to do more than just make the test tougher or spell out the risks of dangerous driving to young people (though these tactics may well be justified for other reasons). We need to change the paradigm of driver learning.

5.2 Opportunities

As well as clarifying the challenges faced by existing approaches to driver learning and testing, our current research puts the spotlight on some specific opportunities that might form an important part of future strategies for better learning.

In particular, a number of the young pre-drivers talked about their real interest in opportunities to develop driving skills at school or college. There was, however, a strong emphasis on learning by doing. For many participants, indeed, the attraction

of having a chance to learn driving at school or college lies precisely in the fact that driving is a practical skill, requiring hands-on learning – in contrast to much other learning. In line with this, those who did suggest taking ‘theory’ classes at school generally did so not through enthusiasm but through a desire to get this part of the current test out of the way as quickly as possible. This emphasis on practical learning has important potential consequences for any school- or college-based driver learning: without a strongly practical element, learning opportunities at school or college might lose much of their potential appeal. A number of participants also suggested importing other aspects of their learning experience elsewhere into driver learning, such as modularity or greater personalisation. On the last point, the segmentation offered in the next sub-section might prove a useful starting point.

Some participants also suggested that aspects of driving and, in particular, road use might sit sensibly in existing areas of the curriculum such as PSHE or Citizenship – interesting suggestions, given the importance of the social activity of driving in the accounts of young people who are already driving. In particular, we have drawn attention in this report to the important role played by young people’s experience of being a passenger in the formation of their views about good driving: the starting point for being an expert driver is to be an ‘expert passenger’. There is a real opportunity here to tackle young passengers’ abilities to observe and assess the driving behaviour of those around them, and also to tackle the ‘double insulation’ of young people in the passenger seat (see Section 2.3).

Undoubtedly, the people who drive young people – and in particular **parents** – have a critical role to play here as well. Many of the parents we spoke to had clear views on the important role they might play when their children were learning to drive, for instance through supervised practice. However, none of them seemed aware of the equally important role they play **before** their children started learning to drive, by acting as role models of good (or bad) driving. We are in no way suggesting that we ‘blame the parents’ here, but, undoubtedly, there is an opportunity to help parents think about the role they might play in preparing their children to be safe drivers.

Any such efforts might also build on the existing appetite of at least some parents for more guidance and support **during** the learning process – for instance, on how to select the right instructor, how to communicate with the instructor, and how to balance the roles of being a paying client and a support for learning – and **after** the test – for instance, on how to negotiate the safe use of a family car or on who should pay for insurance. (Our research was not designed as a best practice, but our conversations with road safety officers alerted us to some excellent work which is already being carried out by LARSOA members in this area.)

Among those we spoke to – both young pre-drivers and parents – we found evidence of a desire to learn more. Our research was not designed to investigate the attitudes of ADIs beyond their perceptions of young drivers, but we believe there

may also be opportunities to think about how this group also learn. In particular, a number of the experienced ADIs we spoke to talked about the ways in which they tailored their approaches to the attitudes and aptitudes of each young person. On further probing, these ADIs stated that this tailoring was something they had ‘picked up’ through their experience, rather than something they had been given specific guidance on. In line with the emphasis on personalisation in other areas of education, there may be real opportunities to equip ADIs from the very beginnings of their careers with the tools to adapt their style to different learners, and to find effective ways to incentivise the use of these tools. Indeed, this might be one way in which a segmentation along the lines of that offered in the next section might be put to direct practical use.

5.3 Different learners, different approaches

Young people, as a group, are as diverse as any other section of the population. A number of participants in our workshops commented on the stereotyping which young people can face (and not only in relation to driving). In this report and our previous report (Christmas, 2007), we have done our best to draw out themes and perspectives shared by large numbers of the participants in our workshop. However, it is worth remembering that each of the young people we met was a unique individual with their own particular history, influences and motivations, who approached learning to drive in their own unique way.

A segmentation is a pragmatic response to this diversity, which seeks to illuminate some of the differences that really make a difference, while giving us a practical basis to develop effective policies and strategies that will be effective not just for individuals but across entire populations. In offering a segmentation of young pre-drivers, learners and drivers at the conclusion of our research, we would like to stress that we are not claiming to have uncovered unchangeable personality differences between young people. More research is needed to validate the proposed segmentation and scale the segments, and also to learn more about why a young person comes to be in a given segment, and whether and how she or he might change over longer periods of time. In the meantime, if we are to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach to communications, learning and testing, it is very helpful to know more about the S, M, L and XL for which we will need to cut our cloth. This is what we offer below: a simple, pragmatic classification of the key mindsets identified in this work, drawing on distinctions made throughout our two reports.

Our proposed segmentation has five segments. For ease of reference we have given each segment a short name. The segments are summarised in Table 5.1. As our work was qualitative and the sample sizes (while very large for a qualitative study of this nature) were too small for statistical analysis, we are not able to provide reliable estimates of the number of young people in each segment. Our experience – in line with data from other sources – would suggest that segments 1 and 5 are significantly smaller than segments 2, 3 and 4.

5.3.1 *Segment 1: rule observers*

Although very few in number, it is important to remember that there were a few young people in our research who expressed a real desire to follow the rules of driving and maintain the standards of good driving shared with them in the test, for no reason other than the fact that they are the rules and standards. For young people in this segment, **good driving is about following rules and standards.**

This is the group for which current approaches to learning and testing are – at least from the attitudinal point of view – best adapted. As long as young people falling in this segment are correctly informed about what the rules and standards are and are given the skills to stick with them, and as long as the rules and standards really do describe safe driving, then these young people will be safe drivers. Unfortunately, as we noted above, the evidence indicates that this segment may be one of the smallest. If this is true, it implies that our current one-size-fits-all approach to learning and testing fits the most unusually shaped people.

5.3.2 *Segment 2: risk minimisers*

Young people in the second segment are unimpressed by laws and standards in and of themselves, but they are, unlike many other young people, very aware of the potential consequences of dangerous driving (and will therefore embrace those laws and standards for which they see a clear safety rationale). For young people in this segment, **good driving is risk-free driving.**

These are the young people who, when pre-drivers or learners, feel concerned about their readiness to pass (see Section 3.1). As described in our previous report (Christmas, 2007), they will experience driving without an instructor as a loss rather than a liberation, and will continue to drive cautiously. One of the things that may most annoy them, indeed, is the way in which other drivers pressurise them to do things that they are not comfortable with, such as drive faster than they wish to. This is the segment for which campaigns such as Think! are likely to be most effective (although participants in this group reminded us that it is important not to scare them off driving by overdoing the message about the risks of driving).

5.3.3 *Segment 3: good neighbours*

Young people in the third segment, as in the second, are unimpressed by laws and standards in and of themselves. Unlike those in the second segment, however, they also give little thought to the risks of driving, being confident in their own abilities as a driver. Instead, their focus is on the social activity of driving, and on the need to show consideration and patience for other road users (and will therefore embrace those rules and standards which they see as being in line with what they see as the social norms of driving). For young people in this segment, **good driving is sociable driving.**

This segment is very obvious among those young people who are already driving (in our first phase of research, for instance). For instance, this is the group most likely to talk positively about the informal instruction they received regarding the ‘real rules of the road’, or to highlight such things as lane-hogging or discourtesy in their definitions of bad driving. Among pre-drivers, however, awareness of the social activity of driving is, as we have seen, largely absent, making the future members of this segment less immediately obvious. Our hypothesis is that these are the young people who, as passengers, respond most to the concern showed by a driver (rather than their confidence or superiority). These are also, therefore, the young people who are susceptible to positive as well as negative peer pressure (see Section 2.4.1).

As the emphasis placed by young people in this segment on ‘informal instruction’ shows, our current approaches to learning and testing seem to be poorly suited to this segment. The segment is also likely to be largely unmoved by communication efforts which focus on the risk of injury and, as comments in our workshops would suggest, alienated by enforcement approaches which ignore anti-social acts such as lane-hogging while penalising other acts which are felt not to be anti-social.

This, however, is unfortunate, as the basic motivation of this group of young people to behave sociably on the road is an essentially positive one – even if their high levels of confidence and sometimes idiosyncratic assessments of what counts as sociable may lead them to drive dangerously in practice. Ways in which this cluster of young people might more effectively be engaged with good driving behaviour include:

- offering them strong role models of sociable driving to challenge some of the existing role models (to which we shall return in discussion of the next segment);
- encouraging young pre-drivers in this group to develop their natural empathy and overcome the double insulation of being a passenger;
- placing more emphasis on the social act of driving in the formal elements of learning and testing;
- ensuring that risk-based communication campaigns also make it clear just how anti-social it is to engage in risky behaviour, however confident one may feel;
- providing a clear sociability rationale for rules and standards, alongside a safety rationale; and
- enforcing sociable as well as safe driving.

Before moving on to the final clusters, we should pause to note that the first three segments align with three basic reasons why someone might decide not to engage in a certain kind of driving behaviour:

- it's illegal or substandard;
- it's risky; and
- it's anti-social.

As an aside, we note that young people in the first cluster may or may not also be concerned about risky or anti-social behaviour – just as young people in the second cluster may or may not be concerned about anti-social behaviour. We have adopted this 'cascade' approach to segmentation because it is the most pragmatic one in the circumstances. There are a small number of young people you can influence merely by putting the right laws and standards in place; then, of those who you can not influence in this way, there are some you can influence by talking about risks; then, of those remaining, there are some who are at least concerned about being sociable.

Unfortunately, this leaves a number of young people – a substantial number, as our own experience suggests – for whom none of the above approaches will work. We propose dividing these young people into two further segments.

5.3.4 *Segment 4: God's gifts*

Young drivers in the fourth segment do not care about rules and standards, nor do they care about the risks of driving or other people on the road. However, they do still care about **driving well**. For young people in this segment, **good driving is confident driving**.

Unfortunately, this is also a group who have confidence in abundance. As passengers, they identify good driving with the projection of confidence and superiority – which also makes them impervious to positive peer pressure (see Section 2.4.1) – and will adopt some version of the talent model. As drivers, their chief complaint will be about those other drivers who are too cautious or nervous and so get in the way. Their confidence, meanwhile, will serve (in the vicious circle identified in our previous research) as sufficient evidence that they really are as good as they think they are until they have a bad accident, are close to losing their licence, or change their attitudes as a result of some major life transition (such as having children). At which point, our experience suggests, they may begin to adopt some of the characteristics of a risk minimiser.

It should be noted that this segment, like the third segment, has a lot to say about the social activity of driving – and in our first phase of research we failed to notice the subtle but important difference between the two segments on this point. Re-analysing the data from that first phase of research in the light of this second phase,

the difference was readily apparent. When young people in segment 3 (good neighbours) talk about the social activity of driving, they are talking about the norms to which they themselves aspire. In contrast, when young people in segment 4 (god's gifts) talk about the social activity of driving, they are basically talking about the shortcomings of the other drivers who get in their way.

As we saw in Section 4.3, it is young drivers in this segment whom some ADIs try to shake by engineering scary situations. There is some sense to this tactic: as noted above, the real experience of an accident is one of the things that may actually change the mindset of a young person in this segment and so move them to another, safer segment. Approaches on these lines may be successful with some young people in this segment, probably those who are already on the borderline of the risk-minimiser segment. Unfortunately, the evidence offered by participants suggests that there are many in this segment whose attitudes will not be changed even by real accidents.

So what can be done to address this critical (and probably sizeable) segment? One option may be to go back to the root of the mindset, and the projection of confidence and superiority as a driver. Our culture appears to be full of role models and messages which valorise confidence and superiority in drivers – what we might call the *Top Gear* vision of good driving. A programme which ranks celebrities on the speed at which they can drive round a race track may be good entertainment, but it must be legitimate at least to ask what kind of impact the lauding of the fast and the gentle ridiculing of the slow has on the prevailing culture of driving and so, indirectly, on the numbers of young people killed on the road (and people killed by them). As we suggested in our first report, the only effective way to tackle this kind of negative role modelling may be to change the direction of the ridicule. The simple fact is that young people in segment 4 are unlikely to be moved by being told how risky or anti-social their behaviour is, but they will be moved if their behaviour, far from projecting superiority, starts to make them look like idiots.

Affecting this kind of cultural change is incredibly hard, of course, especially for the Government, which does not start from a position of credibility with many young people. However, there is one important force which could be co-opted by an effective campaign in this area: peer pressure. A number of our participants talked about times they had asked peers to drive more slowly and less riskily, but had been ignored. By expressing fear, they only boost the sense of superiority in a young driver from this segment. Equipped with a **language** in which to ridicule and laugh, rather than merely express fear, however, these passengers might become a powerful challenge to that sense of superiority. We believe it would be essential to involve young people themselves in the development of such a language, including, most importantly of all, young people who fall into this fourth segment. (While this is not a best practice review, we note that some work has already been done in this area by LARSOA members.)

There may also be a more positive approach to young people in this fourth segment. After all, there is nothing *per se* wrong with wanting to project that one is a superior driver, provided one's definition of superior driving is a safe one. The real problem with young drivers in the fourth segment is that their main measure of superiority is confidence. Indeed, it is on this segment that the impact of the measures gap (see Section 5.1) is most obvious, and for whom the positive impact of a genuinely motivational graded scale of driving ability might therefore be most beneficial in the long term. Young people who boasted about having passed their Level 10 driving proficiency test might be a little irritating, but they might also be considerably safer than young people who project superiority by taking risks that they are not competent to handle.

Getting young people interested in some kind of scale of driving proficiency when all they really want is a licence to drive would, of course, probably prove as hard as implementing the kind of culture change discussed above. Again, however, there are two important forces which could be co-opted. The first force is money. The idea here is not a new one, as it is already applied in the Pass Plus scheme: get the extra training and your insurance premiums are reduced. The challenge is to find ways to embed this approach across the entire training regime. The second force is the licence to drive itself. Again, the idea is not a new one, as the number of points a novice driver can get on their licence has now been reduced from twelve to six. But why not take this principle further, and give a newly passed driver zero available points: any mistakes and the novice will lose their licence – a severe but highly effective deterrent for most young people. Only by undertaking further training, getting more experience or demonstrating required behaviour would people gradually garner more licences to make mistakes (which is what the points system effectively amounts to).

One theme is worth drawing out here. To engage this group we need to create new risks associated with dangerous driving, risks which are much less grave than accidents but also much more likely to happen. This is the basic principle behind fines and other enforcement activity, but other levers are available, as we have discussed: insurance premiums, points on licence and, most powerful of all perhaps, peer pressure. Pulling these levers and tackling this fourth segment will undoubtedly be difficult, but it will also be critical if we are to have an impact on the levels of accident and casualty among young drivers.

5.3.5 *Segment 5: nightmare drivers*

Young drivers in the fifth and final segment, like those in the fourth, do not care about rules and standards, nor do they care about the risks of driving or other people on the road. Unlike those in the fourth segment, they do not care about driving well either. For the relatively small number of young people in this segment, **good driving is entirely irrelevant.**

Clearly, this is an important segment from a road safety point of view. Indeed, young people in this segment will be among the most dangerous drivers on the road. It is also the least tractable segment. For each of the four segments discussed previously, it is possible to identify some aspect that young people in the segment care about, and so is an attitudinal lever which can be used as the basis for communication and learning strategies. No such levers are available for the fifth segment. The only way to influence their behaviour is through credible and consistent enforcement activity, although even this may fail in some cases.

Given this, we believe it is important not to be distracted by the existence of this segment from the huge opportunities that exist to make young people in the third and fourth segments safer drivers. Undoubtedly we have to find ways to tackle ‘nightmare drivers’, but it is among the overconfident ‘good neighbours’ and ‘God’s gifts’ that we may achieve the biggest reductions in accidents and casualties for any given investment of resources, especially in communication and learning.

Table 5.1 summarises the five segments discussed in this section.

Table 5.1: Proposed segmentation of learners

	Segment 1: rule observers	Segment 2: risk minimisers	Segment 3: good neighbours	Segment 4: God's gifts	Segment 5: nightmare drivers
Concerns Rules Risks Sociability Driving well	High High	Low High High	Low Low High High	Low Low Low High	Low Low Low Low
Driving values Pet hates	Conformity Not doing things the way they are meant to be done	Caution Other drivers pushing them to take risks	Consideration Patience Poor signalling, lane-hogging, discourtesy, bad parking	Confidence Superiority Nervous or incompetent drivers getting in the way	None Any constraint on what I want to do
Likely causes of bad driving Existing checks on bad driving	Not knowing rules Instruction for test Highway Code	Not knowing risks Getting flustered Instruction on risks Think!	Overconfidence 'Informal' instruction Passengers Prangs and incidents	Overconfidence Impatience Accidents Life events Nearly on 12 points	Not caring Few, if any
Possible levers	Make sure the rules really reflect good driving Communicate the rules clearly	Communicate risks – but do not overdo it Provide safety rationale for rules Provide low-cost chances to improve skills	New role models of good driving Encourage 'empathy' in pre-driver and driver learning Link safety to anti-social driving in communications Provide sociability rationale for rules Enforce sociable as well as safe driving	Create a language in which to ridicule overconfidence Address the measures gap with real measures of good driving Link these to other motivators, such as money	Credible and consistent enforcement

6 REFERENCES

Christmas, S. (2007) *The Good, the Bad and the Talented: Young Drivers' Perspectives on Good Driving and Learning to Drive*. Road Safety Research Report No. 74. London: Department for Transport.