

## Summary

# «It is clearly not a numbers game»

## Evaluation of the practical driving test for passenger vehicles

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*In this project we have evaluated the practical driver's test for passenger vehicles, and whether current practice complies with the principles in the training model, as well as national and international regulations. To do this, all relevant documents were reviewed. In addition, observations of driver test situations, two group interviews with sensors, and a survey among both sensors ( $n = 77$ ) and traffic instructors ( $n = 288$ ) were carried out. The results indicate that the driving test for the most part is carried out in accordance with legislation, guidelines and requirements, and that the examiners are well pleased with the training they have received in making comprehensive and discretionary assessments. Nevertheless, the results indicate that there are some areas of improvement. The administrative process can be made more efficient. Furthermore, current practices when it comes to ensuring a common language between the candidate and the sensor could be improved. Moreover, issues regarding conflicts of interests and sensor feedback emerged as areas that need further investigation.*

## Background and research questions

A new driver training program for passenger car licenses was introduced in 2005. This program was recently evaluated, with subsequent revision of the Traffic Training Regulations and curricula. However, no equivalent evaluation of the driver's test has been made, nor is there a lot of research on practical driving tests in Norway. With this starting point, the Norwegian Public Roads Administration requested an evaluation of whether the test complies with the principles underlying driver training, as well as national and international regulations regarding the form and content of the test.

The driver training in Norway is based on the GDE model (Goals for Driver Education). This model organizes the tasks a driver must solve in five (previously four) levels. It is assumed that the higher levels largely affect tasks on the lower level. The aim of the Norwegian driver training is to provide drivers with the skills, knowledge and motivation necessary to become responsible drivers. Driver skills are developed through a combination of compulsory and non-compulsory training, a process that continues throughout the life cycle.

The purpose of the driver's test is to assess whether the candidate has developed sufficient driver competence to be able to continue their competence development on their own. It is primarily observable actions and any lack of actions that are measured by the driving test, which mainly reflects the content of steps 2 and 3 in the training.

In the current report, we address several research questions. First, we investigated whether the driving test was practiced in a way that corresponded to the principles used in the driver training model. A second aim, was to assess whether the practice is in accordance with the minimum requirements in the driving license directives from the EU, and Norwegian law and regulations. Among other things, we looked at the extent to which the decision the examiner makes, is in line with provisions in the traffic education regulations and the Administration Act, respectively. We also investigated whether the practice was in accordance with requirements for driver test venues and guidelines for conducting the driving test with regard to the goal of the test, test routes, etc.

## **Document review**

Requirements and principles underlying the practical test are formalized through a number of governing documents at different levels of administration and organization. The sum of these documents constitutes how the test is to be carried out and demands are made on driver test sites, the competence of the sensor, the length of the exam and the content of the examination. There is generally a good fit between the requirements of the EU directives and the national requirements and the objectives of the driving test. In addition, there are several points where the national provisions are somewhat stricter than the minimum requirements in the EU directive. For example, the Traffic Training Regulations define a time frame of 75 minutes for the entire driving test, including driving time. The EU directive, on the other hand requires 25 minutes minimum driving time for class B. The Norwegian guidelines state that the driving time should be 55-60 minutes, which will be well above the minimum requirements of the directive. Furthermore, stricter requirements are imposed on sensor qualifications and competence, in terms of minimum age, length and content of education as well as frequency of quality testing. With the introduction of a new EU directive of January 1st 2016, new safety requirements were put forth, including that driving tests should, if possible, include safe driving in a tunnel, which is also reflected in national regulations.

In national legislation, emphasis is placed on holistic evaluation, that is, the candidate's performance on the driver's test is to be evaluated as a whole, in which the examiner's discretionary assessment is crucial. This is in many ways linked to the basic view of education and driving test in Norway. The driving test is intended to distinguish those who have, from those who do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to continue to develop their driving skills on their own.

## **Observations**

We observed three driving test situations at two different traffic stations. Our observations indicate that the formalized parts of the driving test are practiced relatively equally between different sensors. The course of the test, the role of the examiner and the order of the tasks and messages given as well as the way in which the results were communicated, are all aspects of the test that are more or less standardized. Nevertheless, traffic and the actual driving test situation are very dynamic, which require the examiner's skilful handling of unforeseen events. When it comes to routes, the distribution between road and urban driving seems to be in line with the requirements that form the basis for test driving routes. In one of the three cases, the route included a tunnel. This indicates that test routes include driving in a tunnel in accordance with the directive. The driver's license directive of 2016 emphasizes that routes should include tunnels if available.

## **Group interviews**

We conducted two group interviews on different traffic stations, with a total of six participating examiners. It seems that the examiners generally were pleased with the implementation of a practical driver test. They emphasized the high quality examiner education, with explicit focus on considering difficult cases of doubt. The examiners seemed to have extensive knowledge of content in governing documents and reported that they had easy access to relevant documents if they needed to find information. Even though they were happy with the training they had received in making discretionary

assessments, some mention that they thought it may be harder for the smaller traffic stations to offer equally good opportunities for examiners to evaluate each other. This in turn may make it more difficult to make good assessments in cases of doubt. Most of the examiners were pleased with the length of today's driving test.

The decisions and feedback after tests appear to be in line with the regulations. The informants were generally happy with current feedback practices. Nevertheless, some point out that they sometimes want more possibilities for educational feedback to help the candidates progress. The time intervals in between driver tests were considered very valuable. In these time slots, the examiners exchange relevant information, such as driver test routes that should be avoided, and they prepare, mentally and administratively for their next test. Several examiners reported that this time is sometimes spent doing other administrative tasks, which came at the expense of valuable correspondence with co-workers, and mental preparation. This was regarded as something which had negative implications on well-being and efficiency during the working day.

Judgements regarding conflict of interest is not considered as a problematic area, and the cases that appear are pragmatically solved by the sensors. This is possibly a larger problem on smaller traffic stations, where chances are greater to meet relatives or acquaintances. Another problem is if the examiner and candidate lack a common language. Informants expressed that language barriers can make it difficult to conduct good driver tests.

## **Surveys**

We sent questionnaires to both examiners ( $n = 77$ ) and traffic instructors ( $n = 288$ ). With regard to experience, the sample is diverse. All of the examiners were employed at large traffic stations, while traffic instructors were evenly distributed in small, medium and large traffic schools. Both examiners and traffic instructors replied that there is a good fit between what the practical driver's test is meant to measure and what it actually measures. However, traffic instructors report this to a lesser degree than the examiners.

Many examiners believe that a professional forum across traffic stations would be beneficial, and there are reasons to believe that smaller stations in particular would benefit from such a forum, as they tend to have fewer colleagues nearby. The examiners are pleased with current guidelines and training. It seems that most examiners would like more time to reconcile their judgments, rather than more training. Findings also suggest that today's emphasis is correct, that the guidelines are appropriate, and that the driver's test routes are in line with requirements. Finally, examiners report that test preparation procedures work well and that routines around the final decision work well.

Most traffic instructors, on the other hand, believe that the driver's test should be changed to better measure what it should measure. The traffic instructors also believe that different sensors consider doubtful cases in different ways, and that they should receive more training to assess the cases in a consistent manner. Moreover, traffic instructors also expressed views that the test should be less governing for the training. Traffic instructors seem to be more sceptical about the conduct of the exam, and to the examiners' ability to make good discretionary assessments. Traffic instructors find that the current time frame is sufficient.

## **Conclusions**

Our findings indicate that the driving test in its current form in many areas works well for its purpose, namely to assess the candidate's performance against the objectives of the curriculum and provide a sufficient basis for distinguishing between those who have and those who do not have satisfactory knowledge and ability to be allowed to drive on their own. Our findings also indicate that the decision the examiner makes, does comply with what is stated in the traffic education regulations, and that oral and written submission of the decision works as intended. Some of the sensors suggested that, in some places, it may be a challenge to carry out the driving test in accordance with the requirements for judgements regarding conflicts of interest. This seems to be related to lack of capacity and staffing, especially in rural areas. Based on the data we have available, we cannot say anything specific about how widespread such issues are. Furthermore, the report has discussed the driver's exam in relation to the training model. In particular, we have investigated how the relationship between the principle of developing driver competence over the life cycle, and the driving test, can be perceived as somewhat contradictory, and that clear communication can remedy this.