

Considering the penalties for dangerous driver behaviours in Ireland

Examining speeding, mobile phone use and non-seat belt use

Research Department

August 2022



Contents

1. Introduction	3
1.1 Speeding	4
1.2 Mobile phone use	4
1.3 Non-seat belt use	5
2. Investigation of international best practice regarding specific driving offence penalties (TRL, 2018).....	6
2.1 Key findings – literature review	6
2.2 Key findings – case studies	7
2.3 Recommendations.....	8
3. Penalty points and fines: Speeding, mobile phones and seat belts (B&A, 2021)	10
3.1 Penalty history	10
3.2 Speeding	10
3.3 Mobile phone use	11
3.4 Non-seat belt use	11
4. A qualitative study of disqualified drivers in Ireland: Pathways to disqualification, consequences and perceptions of road safety strategies (Sarma & Cox, 2021)	12
4.1 Key findings.....	12
4.2 Recommendations.....	13
5. Conclusions and recommendations	15
.....	17

1. Introduction

Ireland's Government Road Safety Strategy (2021-2030) was launched in December 2021, setting the target of a 50% reduction in road deaths and serious injuries by 2030, and to achieve Vision Zero (i.e., no deaths or serious injuries) on Irish roads by 2050.

This Strategy is accompanied by a Phase 1 (2021-2024) Action Plan, setting out the initial 50 high-impact and 136 support actions necessary to achieve these longer-term reductions. Action 30 (high-impact) of this Phase 1 Plan tasks the Road Safety Authority (RSA) with the following:

Review the penalties for serious road traffic offences including the following: impaired driving, speeding, mobile phone use, non-wearing of seat belts, carrying unrestrained children in a vehicle.

This Action was initially due for completion in Q4 2024, however, tragically, there has been a significant increase in the number of people killed on Irish roads this year to date. As of the 09/08/2022, 99 people have been killed on Irish roads, 24 more fatalities than on this day in 2021¹. This has led to Action 30 being reprioritised and it is now due for completion by the end of 2022. This increase in fatalities has been a cause of great concern to road safety stakeholders in Ireland, and a number of initiatives are being implemented to address and reverse this trend.

As part of the initial work to address this Action, and to inform decision-making in relation to further initiatives to reduce the 2022 trend in fatalities, this report aims to summarise and synthesise the findings of three pieces of research previously commissioned by the RSA, which relate to penalties for dangerous driver behaviours in Ireland.

The dangerous driver behaviours being examined for the purpose of this report are:

- Speeding,
- Mobile phone use,
- Non-seat belt use (drivers and passengers aged <18 years).

The three research studies² are:

- 'An investigation of international best practice regarding specific driving offence penalties' (Transport Research Laboratory [TRL], 2018).
- 'Penalty points and fines: Speeding, mobile phones and seat belts' (Behaviour & Attitudes [B&A], 2021).
- 'A qualitative study of disqualified drivers in Ireland: Pathways to disqualification, consequences and perceptions of road safety strategies' (Sarma & Cox, NUI Galway, 2021).

This report first provides a selection of key statistics in relation to the dangerous driver behaviours being examined, followed by summaries of the three research studies. A conclusions and recommendations section completes the report, in which the key findings are synthesised to provide guidance on potential next steps for road safety stakeholders in Ireland, to reduce deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

¹ Collision data for 2018-2022 are provisional and subject to change.

² These three research reports, in full, will be sent as accompaniments to this document.

1.1 Speeding

Driving at excessive speed increases the likelihood of a collision occurring, and the severity of injury sustained should a collision occur³. It has been estimated that 10–15% of all collisions and 30% of fatal collisions are the result of speeding or inappropriate speed⁴.

The current penalties for speeding in Ireland are as follows:

Offence	Penalty
Speeding	€80 fine (if paid within 28 days) plus 3 penalty points. Fine increases to €120 if not paid within the 28 days. On conviction in court, there is a maximum fine of €1,000 and 5 penalty points.

RSA analysis of **coronial data** for driver fatalities⁵ (2014-2018) has demonstrated that 24% of driver fatalities with a record of their actions available were exceeding a safe speed. This refers to driving above the speed limit and/or driving at an unsafe speed for the road/conditions.

Data from the RSA's **observational study** of free speed in 2018 found that 52% of car drivers on urban roads (≤ 60 km/h speed limits) and 27% of car drivers on rural roads (≥ 80 km/h speed limits) were driving above the speed limit.

In 2021, the RSA commissioned a **pilot observational study** of free speed on a selection of urban roads with a 50km/h speed limit. Initial findings indicate that:

- 78% of drivers were driving in excess of the posted speed limit of 50km/h.
- During the week, 75% of observed drivers were driving in excess of 50km/h.
- At the weekend, 93% of observed drivers broke the 50km/h speed limit.

The RSA's 2021 **Driver Attitudes and Behaviour survey** found that only 43% of motorists think exceeding 50km/h limits by more than 10km/h is 'totally unacceptable'. Only 46% of motorists think exceeding 100km/h limits by more than 10km/h is 'totally unacceptable'.

1.2 Mobile phone use

It has been estimated that driver distraction is a factor in up to 30% of road traffic collisions in the EU⁶. Drivers using a mobile phone are four times more likely to be involved in a collision⁷. Texting or physically manipulating a mobile phone while driving is particularly dangerous.

The current penalties for mobile phone use while driving in Ireland are as follows:

³ <https://www.itf-oecd.org/sites/default/files/docs/speed-crash-risk.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.roadsafetyfacility.org/publications/road-safety-thematic-report-speeding-european-road-safety-observatory-2020>

⁵ 'Driver' includes motorcycle drivers.

⁶ <https://www.esranet.eu/storage/minisites/esra2018thematicreportno3distraction.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/road-traffic-injuries>

Offence	Penalty
Mobile phone use	€60 fine (if paid within 28 days) plus 3 penalty points. Fine increases to €90 if not paid within the 28 days. On conviction in court, there is a maximum fine of €2,000 and 5 penalty points.

The RSA's **observational study** of mobile phone use (2021) found that 5% of drivers observed were using a mobile phone while driving.

The RSA's 2021 **Driver Attitudes and Behaviours survey** found that 9% of motorists report always or often reading messages/emails on their phones while driving, and 10% check their notifications. This rises to 21% reading messages/emails and 25% checking notifications amongst respondents under the age of 25.

1.3 Non-seat belt use

Wearing a seat belt/using a child restraint is one of the most effective ways to protect motor vehicle occupants from injury, and can reduce the risk of fatal or serious injuries by up to 60%⁸. Wearing a seat belt also prevents the user from becoming a projectile and injuring other vehicle occupants in the event of a collision or near-miss.

The current penalties for non-seat belt use in Ireland are as follows:

Offence	Penalty
Non-seat belt use/ carrying unrestrained children in a vehicle	€60 fine (if paid within 28 days) plus 3 penalty points. Fine increases to €90 if not paid within the 28 days. On conviction in court, there is a maximum fine of €2,000 and 5 penalty points.

RSA analysis of **collision data** found that over a quarter (27%) of drivers and passengers killed on Irish roads in 2021 were not wearing a seat belt⁹. Analysis of 2017-2020 data demonstrated that 10% of seriously injured vehicle occupants were not wearing a seat belt.

The RSA's **observational study** of seat belt wearing (2021) reported that 99% of drivers observed were wearing their seat belts, which decreased to 93% amongst rear adult passengers. 99% of children (primary and secondary school) observed wore seat belts when in the front seat, with 98% of child rear passengers wearing a seat belt.

The RSA's 2021 **Driver Attitudes and Behaviours survey** found that:

- 96% of motorists reported always using a seat belt when they are a driver.
- 95% always use a seat belt when they are a front passenger.
- 83% always use a seat belt when they are a rear passenger.
- 90% always insist that seat belts are worn by those sitting in the front seat of their car.
- 79% always insist that seat belts are worn by those sitting in the back seat of their car.

⁸ <https://road-safety.transport.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-01/Road%20Safety%20Thematic%20Report%20-%20Seat%20belt%20and%20child%20restraint%20systems.pdf>

⁹ Collision data for 2018-2022 are provisional and subject to change.

Considering the penalties for dangerous driver behaviours in Ireland

2. Investigation of international best practice regarding specific driving offence penalties (TRL, 2018)

In 2018, the RSA commissioned TRL to complete a report investigating international best practice for a selection of driving offence penalties, specifically:

- speeding,
- mobile phone use,
- non-wearing of seat belts,
- carrying unrestrained children in a vehicle.

To complete this report, TRL conducted a literature review on the effectiveness of different types and implementation of penalties in deterring the targeted behaviours. They also conducted a case study investigation of the penalties in place for these offences across a selection of countries: the UK, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Australia (Queensland and New South Wales).

In relation to the literature review, it is important to note that the majority of the literature generated from the search process related to penalties for speeding. Some research discussed penalties in a broader sense however, providing evidence relevant to all of the offences examined.

2.1 Key findings – literature review

Increase in penalties and fines

Evidence from the literature review suggests that increases to the penalties incurred through committing a driving offence – whether an increase in monetary fines, increased threat of licence revocation or vehicle impoundment – should show some immediate improvements in compliance, and ultimately, road safety. This is contingent on sufficient public awareness and enforcement of these changes to the penalty system however.

In relation to increasing fines, these can be used to emphasise the wrongfulness of the particular offence(s), however they must be perceived as proportional to the severity of the offence to ensure offenders are willing to actually pay them. Fines could be determined based on the economic status/wages of the offender, however further research is needed in relation to the effectiveness of this approach.

The strongest deterrent appears to be the threat of licence revocation. As such, under a penalty point system, increasing the number of penalty points for certain offences should render drivers less likely to offend, particularly if they already have penalty points. The threat of vehicle impoundment appears to have a similar deterrent effect, with research indicating that these can positively impact road safety, including through removing the dangerous drivers who receive these penalties from the road for a period of time.

Behaviour change and training programmes

Aside from introducing stricter penalties for driving offences, there is some evidence (e.g., from the UK, France and Australia) to support the implementation of rehabilitation programmes to prevent reoffending. These programmes are usually not mandatory, but may be offered to driving offenders under the basis that their penalty will be reduced upon successful completion of the course. They typically require drivers to become aware of and reflect on the negative implications of their behaviour and provide tools and techniques to support drivers in positively changing their driving. Further research is needed however to

Considering the penalties for dangerous driver behaviours in Ireland

better understand the impact of such programmes, and other similar preventative initiatives, and how these could optimally influence driver behaviour.

Intelligent Speed Assistance (ISA) technologies

A number of studies have trialled the use of ISA technologies as a penalty for those who have committed speeding offences. ISA can monitor and/or limit a driver's speed to encourage or enforce compliance to speed limits. While these can effectively limit driver speeding, and may be considered a preferable penalty over a licence disqualification by offenders, their effectiveness is typically observed only while the device is in use in the vehicle. ISA technology does not seem to create a permanent behaviour change, and so, could be combined with other initiatives (e.g., a rehabilitation programme) to optimally reduce speeding in the longer term.

Increased enforcement and public awareness of penalties

Classical deterrence theory proposes that individuals will avoid offending behaviours if they believe that they are likely to be apprehended and that the punishment will be severe and delivered swiftly. Combining these factors appears to be essential in creating an effective penalty system to reduce driver offending, with a series of research studies identified through the review process supporting this.

In order for a change in traffic penalty laws to have a demonstratable effect on behaviour, it is necessary to increase public awareness and understanding of those changes, as well as ensuring that there is a sufficiently strong level of enforcement to uphold these changes and deliver punishment quickly.

'Hardcore' problem drivers

The literature review also highlighted that there exists a group of drivers who, regardless of offence or penalty, continue to engage in dangerous driving. Examples of this can be seen in research investigating 'hooning' behaviours in Australia, for example, which refers to anti-social driving behaviours associated with 'boy-racers', such as driving too fast and dangerously. Focus group research, for example, has demonstrated that hooning offenders were not deterred by stricter sanctions (including vehicle impoundment) with the majority of participants admitting they still frequently engaged in these behaviours.

There are also concerns that repeat offenders may participate in rehabilitation training courses to reduce their penalty, but without changing their behaviours.

2.2 Key findings – case studies

All of the case studies (UK, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Australia) were found to impose mandatory fines (either fixed penalty notices or on-the-spot fines) for all of the offences being examined. In most cases, these penalties (applicable at the roadside) offer an opportunity to avoid going through the courts system, where higher penalties would be applied. Notably, Sweden and Switzerland do not have penalty point systems.

An example of the monetary fines implemented across the different countries for mobile phone use while driving is provided below.

Considering the penalties for dangerous driver behaviours in Ireland

Country	Fine
Ireland	€60, increasing to €90 if not paid within 28 days. Max of €2,000 if convicted in court.
UK	€229. Max of €1,146 if convicted in court (€2,865 for passenger-carrying vehicle or goods vehicle).
Norway	€178.
Sweden	€145.
Switzerland	€87.
Queensland	€248.
New South Wales	€214, increasing to €284 in school zone.

In relation to speeding, all of the countries examined, except for the UK, vary the value of the mandatory fines depending on the extent of the speed excess, with Switzerland, Norway and Sweden further varying the value of the fine depending on the speed limit of the road in question. Regarding non-seat belt use, in New South Wales and Queensland, adult passengers and their driver can be charged where an adult passenger is not wearing a seat belt.

All of the case studies use disqualification or the loss of license as a penalty, although sometimes only for speeding offences. For those countries without a penalty point system, licence loss is a part of the fixed structure of penalties for excessive speed, but does not appear to be a standard outcome for the other offences.

Norway and Switzerland have imprisonment explicitly included in the fixed structure of penalties for speeding, and it is implemented as a matter of routine, based on the degree of excess speed. Imprisonment is possible in the other case study countries at the discretion of the court.

Some of the case studies reported increased penalties under certain circumstances, for example:

- Double penalty points for repeat offences (Queensland)
- Double penalty points in holiday periods or school zones (New South Wales)

Alternative penalties were also described in some of the case studies, for example:

- Awareness courses for all four offences (UK)
- 'Double or nothing' good driving behaviour periods rather than licence loss resulting from exceeding the penalty point thresholds (Australia). This means that the offender retains their licence, but if they receive two or more penalty points in the following year, they receive double the original licence withdrawal period.

2.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings from the literature review and case studies, TRL made the following recommendations to enhance Ireland's penalty system:

- Consider increasing the severity of the penalties already in place for the four targeted offences (e.g., increasing monetary fines and/or penalty points). Note that very high monetary fines can lead to non-payment however, either through financial instability or unwillingness to pay if the fine is perceived to outweigh the seriousness of the offence.

Considering the penalties for dangerous driver behaviours in Ireland

- Consider issuing different penalties based on the severity of the offence. For penalties to be effective however they must be credible and perceived as proportional to the severity of the offence (i.e., more severe offences should receive more severe penalties).
- Consider a graduated framework of penalties for speeding offenders, including trialling the use of Intelligence Speed Assistance (ISA) technologies as a form of penalty. The use of ISA could have an immediate effect on reducing the number of speeding offences by preventing drivers from speeding.
- Undertake research to better understand the effects of different combinations of widely-used penalties such as fines and penalty points. Evaluation of innovative ideas, such as double points for repeat offences, should also be conducted.
- It is important to ensure that sufficient enforcement strategies are in place at a national level to uphold regulations; these must be visible, able to deliver penalties swiftly, and ensure that public awareness of regulations is maintained. Further research into the relative importance of penalty severity, swiftness of punishment and likelihood of apprehension could also be conducted.

3. Penalty points and fines: Speeding, mobile phones and seat belts (B&A, 2021)

In 2021, the RSA commissioned market research company Behaviour & Attitudes (B&A) to conduct a survey of national attitudes towards current and potential penalty points and fines associated with speeding, the use of a mobile phone while driving and non-seat belt use (drivers and passengers aged <18 years). The research was conducted using an omnibus survey based on a nationally representative quota sample of 1,000 adults (aged 16 years and over). The research was conducted during August/September 2021, and the sample consisted of 692 motorists.

A summary of the key findings is provided in Table 1 below, with additional detail provided in the following paragraphs (3.2-3.4).

	Speeding	Mobile Phone	Seatbelts	
			Driver not wearing	Passengers not wearing
	%	%	%	%
Support for increasing current penalty/fines	61	70	66	67
Support for doubling current penalty/fines	47	57	53	53
Predict positive impact on behaviour (Doubling Penalty)	44	35	37	41

Notably, while approximately half of motorists support doubling the current penalties for these driving offences, less than half (range of 35-44%) report that this would make them positively change that behaviour when driving.

3.1 Penalty history

9% of the 692 motorists indicated that they currently have penalty points on their licence, and 25% indicated that they had received penalty points at some point. 26% of the sample reported ever having any penalty points/driver disqualification, which rose to 32% for male participants and 34% for participants aged 35-49 years.

3.2 Speeding

61% of motorists surveyed supported increasing the current penalty for speeding. 55% agreed that there is currently enough Garda enforcement for speeding on Irish roads, with 54% of participants thinking it was likely that they would be detected by Gardaí for speeding.

47% of motorists supported doubling the current penalty (i.e., to 6 penalty points and a €160 fine), with 44% stating that this penalty would make them more likely to drive within the speed limit.

Notably, 63% of motorists supported revising the penalty for speeding so that the more a driver breaks the speed limit, the higher the fines and penalty points incurred. 61%

supported revising the penalties for speeding so that there would be higher penalties for a driver breaking the speed limit in areas with more pedestrians and cyclists.

3.3 Mobile phone use

70% of motorists supported increasing the current penalty for mobile phone use while driving. 41% agreed that there is currently enough Garda enforcement for mobile phone use on Irish roads, with 41% of participants thinking it was likely that they would be detected by Gardaí for mobile phone use while driving.

57% of motorists supported doubling the current penalty (i.e., to 6 penalty points and a €120 fine), with 35% stating that this penalty would make them less likely to use their mobile phone while driving.

3.4 Non-seat belt use

Driving without a seat belt

66% of motorists supported increasing the current penalty for driving without wearing a seat belt. 41% agreed that there is currently enough Garda enforcement for non-seat belt use, with 40% of participants thinking it was likely that they would be detected by Gardaí for driving without a seat belt.

53% of motorists supported doubling the current penalty (i.e., to 6 penalty points and a €120 fine), with 37% stating that this penalty would make them more likely to wear a seat belt while driving.

Driving a vehicle with passengers under 18 years of age not wearing a seat belt

67% of motorists supported increasing the current penalty for driving with passengers under 18 years of age who are not wearing a seat belt. 41% agreed that there is currently enough Garda enforcement for non-seat belt use, with 39% of participants thinking it was likely that they would be detected by Gardaí for driving a vehicle with passengers under 18 years of age who are not wearing a seat belt.

53% of motorists supported doubling the current penalty (i.e., to 6 penalty points and a €120 fine), with 41% stating that this penalty would make them more likely to insist passengers wear a seat belt when they are driving.

4. A qualitative study of disqualified drivers in Ireland: Pathways to disqualification, consequences and perceptions of road safety strategies (Sarma & Cox, 2021)

The RSA commissioned a qualitative research study to better understand the lives of disqualified drivers and their attitudes towards road safety strategies, with the aim to identify avenues for novel road safety interventions. The project report was completed in 2021 by Dr Kiran Sarma and Katie Cox (NUI Galway). They conducted remote interviews with 30 drivers who had experienced a driver disqualification (for different reasons) in the past 5 years, and who had regained their licence at the time of participating. Of those interviewed, 70% (n = 21) were male. The average age was 28.6 years at the time of the offence leading to disqualification. 53% described their place of residence as being rural.

The key findings and recommendations that emerged from this study are presented in summary below.

4.1 Key findings

Processes leading to disqualification

Participants reported a range of factors that they believed contributed to their offending. Dominant amongst these were two key factors:

- Social influence – a perception that many in their community viewed serious traffic offending as common and acceptable.
- Pro-criminal thinking – ways of thinking that legitimise and excuse their engaging in illegal driving behaviours (e.g., they had ‘no choice’ but to drive home after drinking).

In addition to the above, many of the participants reported that their perceived risk of being caught by Gardaí or being involved in a road traffic collision was very low. Certain personality traits (e.g., impulsivity) may also play role.

Consequences of disqualification

Disqualification had both psychological and practical implications for the drivers interviewed. On a psychological level, almost all experienced guilt and felt shamed for their actions. Despite believing that many in society implicitly or explicitly condoned engaging in certain traffic offences, once disqualified, they encountered judgement and stigma.

On a practical level, many reported that they lost their independence and became reliant on the good-will of others (e.g., family, colleagues) to transport them. Feeling that they were becoming a burden, some of the participants left work, stopped training and reduced their attendance at social events, leading to feelings of isolation.

Many of the participants reported reflecting on their lives during the disqualification period, taking steps to address relevant personal difficulties (e.g., problematic drinking), leading to personal growth and in many cases, intentions to drive more safely.

What ‘works’

Attitudes towards driver disqualification as a sanction varied across the participants. Drink-drivers, particularly those disqualified when marginally over the limit and/or driving ‘the morning after’ often felt this was too severe, while those disqualified through accumulating

Considering the penalties for dangerous driver behaviours in Ireland

penalty points felt their sanction was appropriate, having been given sufficient warning of the risk of disqualification. Most drivers thought that the experience of disqualification is so severe that it prevents reoffending, but noted that the threat of disqualification had no bearing on their original offence(s), as they didn't know what this would actually involve/feel like.

A key theme that emerged from the interviews was that there needs to be more of a Garda presence on Irish roads. The participants stressed that as long as drivers view the probability of being detected offending as low, penalty points, fines and disqualification will not reduce persistent offending.

They reported that road safety messaging/ads around the consequences of dangerous driving had little to no effect on their behaviour before being disqualified, as they tended to think the events depicted (serious collisions, injuries and fatalities etc.) would never happen to them. They felt that campaigns should be made more relevant to offenders by depicting the story behind the individuals in the ads, particularly re. the real impacts of disqualification.

The drivers discussed the potential of a public register of disqualified drivers (previously discussed in national media), expressing mixed views as to whether this would actually deter offending. They raised concerns that such a register would have unintended consequences, such as exacerbating the distress of disqualified drivers with pre-existing vulnerabilities, potentially leading to self-harm and suicide.

4.2 Recommendations

Targeting permissive attitudes

Public health messaging can continue to draw the link between serious road traffic offending and road traffic collisions, injuries and fatalities. It can also focus on raising awareness of the potential role of perceived acceptance of dangerous driving in encouraging offending.

Accurate assessments of the acceptability of offending

Until they were disqualified, many drivers didn't appreciate how harshly they would be judged for offending by their communities. Attitudes towards these offences/disqualified drivers could be measured in a national survey and the findings publicised.

Addressing pro-criminal thinking

Crime-prevention programmes which encourage offenders to consider the potential risks associated with their actions, to overcome their tendency to underestimate those risks and take responsibility for their actions, can be harnessed in public health campaigns.

Promoting a more nuanced understanding of 'disqualified drivers'

An important finding from this research was that the processes leading to disqualification vary widely, and that there are multiple routes to disqualification, even for specific types of offences. Road safety interventions must acknowledge these complexities, and be designed to target the different processes involved.

Risk specification in serious road traffic offending

Building from the previous recommendation, being more specific when considering dangerous driving behaviours (e.g., instead of 'drink-driving' more broadly, is the concern 'morning after' drink-driving, impulsive drink-driving, persistent drink-driving etc.) will facilitate the identification of more targeted risk factors, and more effective mitigation strategies.

Considering the penalties for dangerous driver behaviours in Ireland

Making disqualification 'real' for drivers

The drivers interviewed concluded that if they knew what disqualification would really be like, they would have been more careful on the roads. This points to the potential value of public health messaging that conveys the real-world consequences of disqualification.

Publicly naming disqualified drivers

There was consensus that publicly naming disqualified drivers would have a host of negative, unintended consequences for offenders, particularly for those with mental health difficulties. The societal ethics of such an initiative, in addition to its unknown efficacy, would need to be investigated and deliberated thoroughly.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

In light of the evidence on the prevalence of speeding, mobile phone use while driving and non-seat belt use in Ireland (Section 1), the increase in road user fatalities observed from 2021-2022, and the evidence provided across the three summarised reports, there is a rationale to introduce stronger penalties to deter these offences in Ireland. The following points can be considered in relation to this.

■ Irish research

Irish research could be conducted to identify the most effective penalties/combination of penalties to deter drivers from engaging in these offences. This is of particular importance as less than half (35-44%) of the participants in the 2021 B&A penalties survey said doubling the current penalties for these offences would make them positively change that behaviour when driving, for example.

This research could also explore the relative importance of perceptions of penalty severity, swiftness of punishment and likelihood of apprehension on deterring offending, to inform optimal approaches.

■ Enforcement perceptions

As outlined in the B&A penalties survey (2021) and qualitative research (Sarma & Cox, 2021), it was found that there is a perception in Ireland that there are not enough members of An Garda Síochána policing the roads, and that drivers are unlikely to be apprehended while engaging in traffic offences. Enforcement is critical to the success of any penalty increases, as deterrence theory posits that people will not change their behaviour unless they believe they are likely to be detected, and then receive a swift and severe punishment.

■ Public awareness

In line with this, widespread public awareness and understanding of any changes to the penalty point system in Ireland, and any changes in enforcement to support this, will be key to the success of these changes in reducing offending. Campaigns focusing on the lived experiences of those disqualified from driving, and highlighting how unacceptable traffic offences are, may also prove effective deterrents.

■ Fines

As highlighted by the mobile phone example provided in this report, the TRL (2018) case studies demonstrated that Ireland's fixed charge fines tend to be low compared to those in other countries (albeit accompanied by penalty points). Per the findings of the literature review, these fines could be increased to reduce offending, however they must be deemed proportional to the severity of the offence.

■ Penalty points

The strongest deterrent appears to be the threat of license revocation, with similar effects for vehicle impoundment. Under a penalty point system featuring disqualification and/or impoundment, increasing the number of penalty points for certain offences should render drivers less likely to offend, particularly if they already have penalty points. Sufficient resources to process a potential initial increase in drivers being disqualified/vehicles being impounded would need to accompany such a directive however.

■ **Graduated speeding penalties**

Ireland could consider implementing graduated speeding penalties (i.e., where the penalty is based on the degree of excess speed and/or the road type), which are in place in several best practice countries (e.g., Norway and Sweden). The survey research on penalties by B&A (2021) demonstrated that there was greater public support for this approach than for doubling the current penalty for speeding in Ireland.

■ **Technological interventions**

Technological interventions, such as Intelligent Speed Assistance (ISA) or alcohol interlocks, could play a role as a penalty for 'hardcore problem drivers', by removing their ability to engage in the offence. This must be complimented with other behaviour change interventions to ensure the driver does not commence offending again once the device is removed however.

■ **Rehabilitation/awareness courses**

Ireland could consider implementing rehabilitation/awareness courses to prevent reoffending. This is currently being examined in the context of speeding under Action 74 of the Government Road Safety Strategy's Phase 1 (2021-2024) Action Plan. This action is underway and due for completion in Q3 2022 and tasks the RSA to:

Conduct a literature review on international best practice on speed awareness courses, to produce recommendations and inform the implementation of a speed awareness course in Ireland to eliminate reoffending.

■ **Examining specific behaviours/risk factors**

When considering traffic offences, disqualified drivers and designing preventive measures, it is important to consider the range of risk factors and behaviours that may fall under a single offence (e.g., drink-driving). It is critical that interventions target the risk factors for specific behaviours (e.g., drink-driving the 'morning after') rather than the broader offence or, for example, 'disqualified drivers' as a whole.

Údaras Um Shábháilteacht Ar Bhóithre
Road Safety Authority

Páirc Ghnó Ghleann na Muaidhe, Cnoc
an tSabhaircín, Bóthar Bhaile Átha Cliath,
Béal an Átha, Co. Mhaigh Eo, F26 V6E4.

Moy Valley Business Park, Primrose Hill,
Dublin Road, Ballina, Co. Mayo, F26 V6E4.

Tel: (096) 25 000 Email: info@rsa.ie
Website: www.rsa.ie

 **MyRoadSafety.ie**

Your online resource to easily
and safely manage all your
driver information, services,
tests, permits and licences.