

The Irish Graduated Driving Licence (GDL) System for Learner / Novice Drivers

Learning Phase

A person in Ireland who wants to get a full driving licence for a motorcar or motorcycle has a number of steps to follow.

Stage 1- Initially, s/he has to pass a driver theory test, this can be taken from age 15 onwards as a pass certificate lasts for two years. To pass this test 35 out of 40 multiple choice questions must be answered correctly. The questions cover a range of topics including road safety, rules of the road, identifying hazards, pedestrians, and basic technical aspects of the vehicle.

Stage 2- Having passed the theory test an application is made for a learner permit, the application must include a report on the applicant's vision and if the person suffers from certain medical conditions a report from a GP or Consultant about the impact of the illness on ability to drive. A learner permit holder for a car can start to drive but has a number of restrictions-

- Must be accompanied by a person who has held a full licence for a motorcar for two years
- Cannot drive on a motorway
- Must display the letter L plates on the vehicle or in the case of motorcyclists wear a tabard displaying the letter L on the front and back
- Cannot take a driving test until s/he holds the first learner permit for at least six months and has completed a minimum of 12 Essential Driver Training lessons with an RSA registered Approved Driving Instructor.
- In the case of a motorcyclist s/he must complete the 16 hours of Initial Basic Training before they can ride the motorcycle other than when taking this training
- Reduced drink driving limits for learner drivers
- Lower Penalty Points threshold for new holders of a learner permit

A learner permit generally lasts for two years and can be renewed for a further two years following which it generally lasts for one year unless the person has taken a driving test.

Approved Driving Instructors

Over 1,900 Approved Driving Instructors (ADIs) nationwide have been approved by the RSA to provide tuition. The ADI's role is to help the learner become a better, safer more competent driver / rider.

EDT & IBT

Learner drivers for a car are now required to undertake at least 12 hours of compulsory Essential Driver Training (EDT) with an Approved Driving Instructor (ADI).

The introduction of the Essential Driver Training scheme is designed to help learner drivers learn vital driving skills and also enhance their understanding of road safety. The 12 one-hour sessions tackle 10 specific 'high risk' issues to ensure drivers are fully equipped to drive safely from the very beginning of their motoring careers.

For those learning to ride a motorbike a course of Initial Basic Training must be taken. This involves 16 hours of compulsory training with an approved IBT trainer approved and registered with the RSA.

Stage 3- Driving Test. After a minimum of six months a learner can sit the driving test. The test examines the ability of the learner to carry out certain manoeuvres, manage the vehicle in different traffic and road conditions and where possible on dual carriageways. The test also assesses the ability of the learner driver to recognise hazards and to deal with them.

On passing the driving test a person applies for a full driving licence but continues to have a number of restrictions. These include;

- For persons granted a first driving licence on or after the 1st August 2014, display N plates front and rear of the vehicle or in the case of motorcyclists wear a tabard displaying the letter N on the front and back, for a period of two years after getting their first such licence
- Reduced drink driving limits for novice drivers (for a period of two years from getting a full driving licence)
- Lower Penalty Points threshold

Requirement to display 'N' plates

In the first two years after acquiring a full driving licence a driver must display N plates on all vehicles (wear an N tabard for Motorcyclists) for which they hold a full driving licence. This requirement applies to anyone who is issued with their first ever full driving licence on or after the 1st August 2014 in any category.

Drivers will be required to display 'N' plates in a similar fashion (front and rear) to 'L' plates. The number of people who will become subject to the requirement to display N plates will initially be approximately 1,000 rising to approximately 110,000 over the following 2 years. This is likely to be the maximum number of drivers required to display N plates.

Motorcyclists will be required to wear a Tabard with an 'N' displayed, similar to the 'L' Tabard currently used by learner motorcyclists.

It is important to note that a driver does NOT have to display an 'N' Plate or wear an 'N' Tabard (motorcyclist) if the driver already holds a full licence in any category prior to the 1st August 2014.

Novice 'N' Plates and 'N' Tabards will be available from the usual retail outlets.

Drink Driving restriction

In 2011 drink driving limits were reduced. In particular new limits were introduced for Learner drivers and Novice drivers (for a two year period after getting their full driving licence).

Such as person shall not drive or attempt to drive; or be in charge with intent or attempt to drive, a mechanically propelled vehicle in a public place while there is present in his or her body a quantity of alcohol such that,

1. The concentration of alcohol in his or her blood will exceed a concentration of;
 - a. 20 milligrammes (mg) of alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood.
 - b. The concentration of alcohol in his or her urine will exceed a concentration of 27 mg of alcohol per 100 millilitres of urine.
 - c. The concentration of alcohol in his or her breath will exceed a concentration of 9 microgrammes of alcohol per 100 millilitres of breath.

The penalties that apply to these drivers are as follows;

The driver will be arrested, brought to a Garda Station and required to provide evidential breath or blood or urine specimens. In all cases where the BAC is between 20 and 80mg the driver will be served with an on the spot fixed penalty notice and receive a fine of €200 and the person will be disqualified from holding a driving licence for a period of 3 months.

New Penalty Points Threshold

Aside from an outright driving disqualification there are a range of offences that attract penalty points such as speeding, using a mobile phone, dangerous overtaking and not wearing a seatbelt. In total there are 48 offences that attract penalty points.

Persons granted a first learner permit on or after the 1st August 2014, who while driving under a learner permit or subsequently during the first two years of their first driving licence, accumulate a total of 7 penalty points in a three year period will be subject to disqualification for 6 months. (Note: the lower threshold does not apply to a person who already has a learner permit or a driving licence.)

Crash Risk

The behaviours that cause crashes among Learner and Novice drivers result mostly from the inexperience of the driver. This is a heightened risk in the case of young males who are more likely to engage in risk taking behaviour. The available evidence suggests that a driver is considered to be experienced when s/he has driven 100,000 kilometres. Having driven to this extent means that the person will have covered most road, weather, pedestrian and traffic conditions and will have dealt with many hazards and challenging situations which will help to build driving competence.

In Ireland the evidence points to, speeding, drink/drug driving and fatigue as being primary causes of collisions; when any of these factors are combined with inexperience the risk of a crash is increased.

Results of research conducted in the UK shows that an 18 year old driver is more than three times as likely to be involved in a crash as a 48 year old and that one in five new drivers has a crash within six months of passing their test.

It is common for inexperienced drivers to become over confident and over-estimate their ability or skill levels. This places them at higher risk of being involved in a collision.

Collision statistics in Ireland show that;

- In 2013, 6% of drivers (1 in 17 drivers) involved in fatal collisions were learner drivers (where licence status was known) (Table 1)
- In 2013, 6% of drivers (or 1 in 17 drivers) involved in serious injury collisions were learner drivers (where licence status was known) (Table 1)

Table 1. Car or van drivers involved in road traffic collisions, 2013¹

Drivers Licence Status	Accident Type			Total
	Fatal	Serious	Minor	
Not learner	94	192	3802	4088
Learner accompanied	2	6	62	70
Learner unaccompanied	4	7	262	273
Not known	30	40	378	448
Total	130	245	4504	4879

- Between 2007 and 2012, 12% of drivers (or 1 in 8 drivers) involved in fatal collisions were learner drivers (where licence status was known) (Table 2)

¹ Provisional data

- Between 2007 and 2012, 11.8% of drivers (or 1 in 9 drivers) involved in serious injury collisions were learner drivers (where licence status was known) (Table 2)

Table 2. Car or van drivers involved in road traffic collisions, 2007- 2012²

Drivers Licence Status	Accident Type			Total
	Fatal	Serious	Minor	
Not learner	716	1757	27384	29857
Learner accompanied	12	41	665	718
Learner unaccompanied	87	194	2565	2846
Not known	326	450	3956	4732
Total	1141	2442	34570	38153

Compliance with ‘L’ Plate and ‘Accompanied Driving’ Regulations

Recent Learner Driver Operations held in May 2014 produced the following. Nationally there were 782 learner permit holder drivers monitored. 263, or just over a third (33.6%) were found to be unaccompanied at the time of driving. 155, or just under a fifth (19.8%) were not displaying L plates. In some cases, both breaches were committed by the same driver.

This mirrors previous Garda operations targeting Learner Drivers e.g. in 2012 which showed that a significant percentage are not abiding by the conditions of their Learner Permit. Of the 2200 drivers checked, 43% (946) were un-accompanied by a full licence holder, and 30% (660) were not displaying L plates. Again in some cases both offences were committed by the same driver.

Total number of LP holders.

There are a total of 238,726 Learner Permits and a total 2,445,213 full licence holders as of 30 April 2014.

² This covers all road traffic collisions reported to An Garda Síochána, where details involving fatalities or personal injury which occurred on public roads in Ireland between 2007 and the end of 2012 have been recorded and forwarded to the RSA

There are a total of 210,000 category 'B' car Learner Permits broken down as follows in Table 3:

Table 3 - Learner Permit Licences by Count for all categories and B category only

Learner Permit Count	Number of Drivers (All categories)	Number of Drivers (B category only)
1st	106,520	87,418
2nd	69,229	62,389
3rd	21,794	20,657
4th	14,066	13,675
5th	8,715	8,545
6th	5,287	5,197
7th	3,527	3,465
8th	2,809	2,759
9th	2,313	2,259
10th	1,885	1,847
11th or more	2,581	2,526
TOTAL	238,726	210,737