

Transport for NSW | Centre for Road Safety

Process evaluation of the Safer Drivers Course: Summary report

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1 Key findings

- Overall, the evaluation found that the Safer Drivers Course was operating effectively in most aspects of management, course structure and delivery, and access and completion. Strengths in the operation of the Safer Drivers Course included course delivery documents, booking processes, course completion rates and high participant satisfaction ratings for most aspects of in-class and practical components.
- While the Safer Drivers Course has achieved reasonable reach and access, findings suggest there is greater potential to reach young learners in regional and remote areas as well as those from low socioeconomic and non-English speaking backgrounds. Some concerns were raised around the focus on the 20 credit hours incentive, including participants attending “just for the 20 hours” who may undermine the learning experience of others.
- The findings indicate there is a need to refine aspects of the course components, delivery model, business rules, and administration to improve processes that contribute to achieving the course objectives.
- Key suggested improvements to consider regarding administrative issues include: improve communication strategies between Roads and Maritime Services and course providers; increase flexibility of business rules for providers related to participant numbers, particularly in low demand areas; establish a fit-for-purpose Customer Relations Management System for Providers; revise pre-requisites, content, delivery and assessment of the ‘train-the-trainer’ course; and assist providers with ongoing support and development for facilitators and coaches.
- Key suggested improvements to consider regarding course content and delivery include: removing unnecessary information and repetition from Module 1 (a facilitated group discussion session); updating videos and statistics; allowing more opportunity for interaction and activities; refining lower performing components of Module 2 (a coaching session) and reviewing the coaching guide; more explicit linking of Modules 1 and 2; and revising content of participant feedback forms.
- Actions to enhance the various procedural components of the Safer Drivers Course will help ensure its sustainability as a successful component of the educational and licensing initiatives for novice drivers. Work has been completed or is underway to address many areas identified for improvement of the course.

2 About the evaluation

Young drivers, particularly provisional drivers, are at a greater risk of being involved in casualty crashes compared with older more experienced drivers, particularly during their first months of unsupervised driving. Alternatively, the crash risk of learner drivers is amongst the lowest of any driver group.

The Safer Drivers Course was launched on 1 July 2013 as an optional accredited component under the NSW Graduated Licensing Scheme (GLS). It aims to help learner drivers to become safer drivers as they progress to driving solo as a provisional licence holder.

Transport for NSW (TfNSW) commissioned The Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC), in partnership with the Transport and Road Safety (TARS) Research Centre at University of New South Wales (UNSW), to undertake a process evaluation of the Course.

The process evaluation aimed to assess the overall implementation and delivery of the Course, and was conducted between 2015 and 2017. This report presents a summary of the findings of the evaluation.

2.1 The Safer Drivers Course

The curriculum framework for the Safer Drivers Course (SDC) was developed by a Ministerially-appointed Advisory Board of independent road safety experts and is based on adolescent cognitive developmental principles and best practice in young driver education. The SDC seeks to teach young learner drivers about assessing risk and making safe decisions when driving.

The SDC was designed for young learner drivers who have completed at least 50 hours on road driving experience. The overall aims of the course are to:

- Target attitudes and behaviour in relation to minimising and managing risks;
- Provide coaching in low risk driving strategies; and
- Improve the safety of learner drivers as they progress to a provisional licence and drive unsupervised

The SDC has two modules: one theoretical and one practical.

- Module 1: A three-hour facilitated group discussion on how to manage risks on the road. This aims to build awareness of risks, and safe driving behaviours and decisions.
- Module 2: A two-hour in-vehicle coaching session with a coach and another learner to develop low-risk driving strategies. This aims to reinforce and practise low risk driving behaviours.

TfNSW is the policy owner of the Course, which is delivered through Roads and Maritime Services (RMS). Accredited Course Providers engage Trainers (facilitators and coaches) who hold specified qualifications and experience to deliver the SDC modules.

2.2 Evaluation questions

The specific process evaluation questions were:

1. To what extent is the SDC operating effectively?
2. What (if any) improvements are necessary to meet the course objectives?

2.3 Evaluation methods

The research used a mixed-method design involving seven data sources:

1. The SDC Quality Assurance report, which was prepared for TfNSW by a separate independent consultant and completed in 2016.
2. Interviews with stakeholders involved in the development, implementation and/or administration of the SDC.
3. Interviews with SDC providers ($n=17$).
4. An on-line survey of SDC facilitators ($n=65$) and an on-line survey of coaches ($n=90$)
5. Online surveys of SDC participants across three time points:
 - a. Survey 1 (pre-SDC) had 1,320 participants
 - b. Survey 2 (post-SDC) had 844 participants
 - c. Survey 3 (post-P1 licence) had 534 participants
6. An on-line survey of parents/guardians of SDC participants ($n=426$).
7. An on-line survey of young drivers who did not participate in the SDC ($n= 118$ of which 81 per cent were P1 licence holders, with the remaining expected to gain their P1 licence within 3 months).

In addition, observations of one Module 1 and Module 2 delivered by two providers were undertaken in order to inform interpretation of findings.

All methods and procedures carried out as part of this process evaluation were approved by the Monash University Human Ethics Committee (Project number CF14/3513 2014001807).

3 To what extent is the Course operating effectively?

The evaluation found the SDC was operating effectively in most aspects of management, course structure and delivery, and access and completion. Strengths in the operation of the SDC included:

- course delivery documents
- booking processes
- course completion rates for both modules
- high participant satisfaction ratings for most aspects of in-class and practical components.

The evaluation also identified some issues that would benefit from refinement, including:

- aspects of administration
- training for facilitators and coaches
- some aspects of course content and delivery (discussed in the next section).

While the SDC has achieved reasonable reach and access, findings suggest there is greater potential to reach young learners in regional and remote areas and from low socioeconomic and non-English speaking backgrounds.

4 What improvements are necessary to meet the course objectives?

The findings indicate there is an opportunity to refine some aspects of the course components, delivery model, business rules, and administration to improve processes that contribute to achieving the course objectives.

Key suggested improvements to consider regarding administrative issues include: improve communication strategies between RMS and course providers; flexibility of business rules for providers related to participant numbers, particularly in low demand areas; ensure the Customer Relations Management System for Providers can adequately support the needs of both RMS and Providers; revise pre-requisites, content, delivery and assessment of the 'train-the-trainer' courses; and assist providers with ongoing support and development for facilitators and coaches.

Key suggested improvements to consider regarding course content and delivery include: removing unnecessary information and repetition from Module 1, updating statistics, and allowing for more opportunity for interaction and activities; review the coaching delivery guide; more explicit linking of Modules 1 and 2; and revising content of participant feedback forms and considering an online version.

More generally, the following opportunities should be explored:

- Broaden course delivery in regional and remote areas.
- Develop SDC-based resources for immigrants and those from non-English speaking backgrounds.
- Require a minimum level of participation or engagement by participants as part of SDC completion.
- Develop a defined QA and audit schedule.

Actions to enhance the various procedural components of the SDC will help ensure its sustainability as a successful component of the educational and licensing initiatives for novice drivers.

5 Findings related to specific aspects of the Course

The sections below present findings from the process evaluation that relate to specific aspects of the SDC, and reflect consideration of all relevant information gathered for the process evaluation.

5.1 Course structure, content and delivery

The evaluation suggests the overall structure of the SDC works relatively well, and a high proportion of SDC participants were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with module 1 (79 per cent) and module 2 (86 per cent). Over 90 per cent of participants reported Module 2 kept them interested and had mean usefulness ratings of 84 per cent. Most facilitators (98 per cent) and coaches (94 per cent) indicated that the SDC was very or somewhat effective in achieving learning outcomes.

Module 1

The majority of facilitators surveyed were positive about the effectiveness of module 1's course structure; although 60 per cent of surveyed facilitators believed participants found the module 'too long'. This view was not strongly supported by SDC participants; only five per cent suggested the course could be improved by making module 1 shorter. When asked about the pace of the session, 70 per cent of participants reported module 1 was "about right", with 20 per cent reporting it was "a bit too slow".

Most discussions and activities were rated as "very effective" by a majority of facilitators. However, "Communicating with Action, Impact, Recommend (AIR)", "Speaking up with AIR", and "Revisiting the questionnaire and awareness scale" were rated not at all effective by 36, 25, and 22 per cent of facilitators respectively (the remainder rated them as somewhat-very effective). Some facilitators also felt too much emphasis was placed on discussions.

Conversely, for SDC participants, 87 per cent indicated that Module 1 kept them interested and the majority felt that the group sessions were a good idea. One quarter of SDC participants suggested improvements to Module 1, and the most frequent suggestions were increasing the level of interaction in the sessions and undertaking more group activities.

The evaluation found that differences between facilitator and participant ratings may be, at least in part, due to perceptions of young drivers' preferences, preconceptions about what is valuable to young learner drivers, and habitual teaching/instruction styles.

Module 2

For module 2, 70 per cent of surveyed coaches felt participants found Module 2 'just right', with 20 per cent indicating participants found it 'too short'. A large majority of coaches rated most drive and discussion components as "very effective". Nonetheless, a recurring theme of concern from coaches was the value of the drive being dependent on road conditions. Some coaches also suggested that the participants were less engaged by the discussion format, although this view was not supported by surveyed participants. At least 80 per cent of responding coaches reported finding it either "easy" or "very easy" to use

both the 3-1-1 rule and AIR feedback models. Those who reported using the 3-1-1 rule as “difficult” to use (18 per cent) indicated it was time-consuming, unnatural, and often difficult to apply.

SDC participants were generally very positive about Module 2. Almost all SDC participants (96 per cent) reported that Module 2 content was easy to understand and over 90 per cent rated the module overall as either ‘excellent’, ‘very good’ or ‘good’, with 94 per cent reporting the session kept them interested. Average usefulness ratings for each of the components in Module 2 were between 78- 87 per cent.

The SDC approach to peer learning (pairing two learners together) was viewed positively by 4 in 5 coaches, although most coaches noted that they had to prompt participants to provide feedback (11 per cent had to always prompt and a further 65 per cent often prompted). Just over three-quarters indicated that peer participants provided a little feedback to each other, with 16 per cent saying the peer provided a lot. Nearly 60 per cent of younger driver participants said that they learned something from their peer. There may be opportunities to increase the impact of this component.

5.2 Reach, access and completion

The SDC is achieving reasonable market penetration and demographic spread for a voluntary program. Nevertheless, findings suggest that improvement is possible. Just over a third of facilitators (38 per cent) and coaches (36 per cent) suggested some groups of young drivers may experience difficulty accessing the SDC, including those from CALD backgrounds (17 per cent of facilitators and 9 per cent of coaches) and young drivers with a disability (17 per cent of facilitators and 16 per cent of coaches). Twenty-three per cent of facilitators and 10 per cent of coaches indicated ‘other’ types of learners who may have problems accessing the SDC and these included young drivers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, those living in regional or remote areas, those with mental illness diagnoses and/or those with disengaged parents.

The most frequent reason for not registering for the SDC by non-participants was that it was too expensive (25 per cent), however on average non-participants also completed slightly more professional lessons than participants, suggesting cost was not a barrier for all non-participants.

A slightly higher proportion of non-SDC participants were from a remote or very remote area, supporting feedback from some providers that convenience of course location was a greater barrier for those participants. However, only 6 per cent of non-SDC participants indicated an inconvenient location as a reason for not registering. More common reasons were lack of time (24 per cent) and timing of the SDC not being convenient (18 per cent).

Information from Providers suggested that most young drivers who register for the SDC complete Module 1 or reschedule, and do not cancel. Almost all who complete Module 1 go on to complete Module 2. Providers use a range of strategies to limit cancellations and no-shows which appear to be effective. The 20 hours of credit may also be a strong motivating factor for the high completion rates for both modules.

5.3 Impact on licensing journey

Stakeholders identified the robust development process, structure and content of the course as reasons to expect positive outcomes. Most facilitators (98 per cent) and

coaches (94 per cent) believed that the SDC improves young driver safety and this was echoed in the perception of parents/guardians of SDC participants. Parents noted the key benefits of the SDC were to help young drivers develop safe (85 per cent) and good (76 per cent) driving skills, and gain a better understanding of safety (82 per cent).

All providers felt that the course is valuable and achieving its aims. Nonetheless, some stakeholders recognised that the impact of the SDC might be limited by it primarily reaching young drivers whose parents have a focus on safe driving.

The SDC was highly recommended by both parents/guardians (96 per cent somewhat or very likely) and SDC participants (95 per cent somewhat or very likely).

5.4 Development and implementation

Development and implementation of the SDC was positive. Strengths included detailed consideration of both education delivery methods for young learner drivers and how to promote participation in the SDC. Areas that could have been strengthened included: the limited time allowed for course development and consultation with all key target groups, particularly young people and those defined by low socioeconomic status (SES) and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD); the need for a dedicated team responsible for oversight of all aspects of course development and implementation; and provision for regular meetings between involved agencies and stakeholders.

5.5 Marketing and promotion

The evaluation found mixed effects of SDC marketing and promotion. While the centralised marketing approach – where materials are developed by CRS for providers to use – supported accurate and consistent messaging, most providers felt it would be useful for RMS/TfNSW to more actively promote the SDC and consider targeting parents/guardians of young drivers. This is supported by responses from Course participants, with over 80 per cent surveyed indicating they found out about the course through a family member, a friend or their driving instructor.

The 20 hours log book credit for completing the SDC was found to be a strong participation motivator: 43 per cent stated this as their ‘main’ reason for attending, and 24 per cent as an additional reason. The motivation ‘to be a safer driver’ was the second highest main reason (34 per cent) and the most common additional reason (31 per cent).

Some concerns were raised around the focus on the 20 credit hours incentive, including participants attending “just for the 20 hours” who were reported to at times have negative attitudes and undermine the learning experience of others. Others saw no problem with using the 20 credit hours as an incentive for participation, because they believed it provided those participants the opportunity to learn something that will increase their safety.

5.6 Management and administration

Governance framework and guidance documents

Most providers reported that the Accreditation Agreement and Provider Guide were comprehensive and easy to use. A few providers found these documents dense and

legalistic. Aspects that could be strengthened centred on rules for marketing by providers and subcontracting, and submitting invoices in a timely manner.

Interactions of RMS with TfNSW and Service providers

The evaluation found the interaction between RMS, TfNSW and providers generally worked well, although some challenges were reported with staff resources and the administrative system supporting the program. Timely responses to queries and having a dedicated, single and reliable point of contact within RMS would help with reported communication issues

Quality assurance processes

The type and extent of activities for ongoing review and development of SDC trainers varies widely across providers. Several providers suggested that there should be better RMS oversight of provider review and development procedures. This may include clearer guidelines about process and frequency, the development of training tools and opportunities for networking and external review.

Interactions of Providers with Facilitators and Coaches

Just over 70 per cent of facilitators and nearly 80 per cent of coaches surveyed reported being “very satisfied” with the level of ongoing support, training and development provided by their Provider. The remainder identified a lack of ongoing training and development as a key concern. Regarding specific concerns, facilitators highlighted the time elapsed since their initial training and lack of performance feedback, while coaches highlighted a lack of opportunity to observe and meet with other coaches and lack of performance feedback.

Business Rules for delivery

While most providers understood the rationale for minimum participant number requirements for both Module 1 and 2, the requirements were found to cause difficulties for some providers in delivering the course, particularly in regional and remote areas.

The requirement of having at least six participants in Module 1 did not present an issue for most providers, although it could reduce course frequency and in some instances result in cancellation. Nine providers (54 per cent) reported that they had to cancel courses on occasion and three (17 per cent) indicated this requirement caused difficulties for them, with low volume providers more affected. Reaching the minimum number can be compounded by late cancellations or no-shows and attendees not meeting log book requirements for minimum driving experience resulting in rescheduling.

Similarly, the requirement that two learner drivers be present for Module 2 was reported to cause difficulties for about half of providers surveyed, and several noted it was the largest challenge in delivering the SDC. Some providers have instigated a number of strategies to avoid un-partnered participants; however some of these strategies reflected paired learning (for example, using another coach) rather than peer learning, to balance customer service and business viability. This requirement could be better communicated in training and the delivery guide.

Administrative processes

The majority of administrative processes were found to be effective. However, the IT system and invoicing were questioned by both RMS and providers. Providers reported several issues with the Customer Records Management (CRM) system in particular the

need to duplicate information provided in the CRM into a “master register”. RMS representatives were aware of issues around invoicing, IT systems and purchase orders, and highlighted some opportunities to support and improve administrative processes and associated IT systems, such as streamlining provider weekly attendance reporting.

Obtaining and using participant feedback

Although most providers review participant feedback forms, it was felt that the feedback was of limited value because only a few questions are relevant to providers, and the forms have to be handed back to trainers who sign off on the 20 hours credit.

Issues Resolution

Issues resolution processes were found to be effective, with RMS stakeholders reporting minimal difficulty with the process. Providers are referred to the Accreditation Agreement or Provider Guide, and trainers who contact them are referred to providers. Issues that cannot be resolved are referred to TfNSW, who were perceived to give a timely response.

Provider booking processes

Generally, provider-booking processes were found to be effective; only three per cent of SDC participants rated the booking process as difficult or very difficult. However, of note 90 per cent of parents surveyed indicated that they were involved in the final decision to register for the SDC, and 73 per cent of SDC participants noted that their parent(s) paid in full. Therefore, many of the interactions in relation to course administration were between parents and providers. Parents were not asked directly about the booking process.

5.7 Recruitment and training of facilitators and coaches

Facilitator and coach requirements

Employment criteria requirements for facilitators and coaches were generally found to be appropriate. Some stakeholders believed the criteria could be revised to more adequately ensure facilitators and coaches possess the right skills and knowledge for student focused learning and for coaching module 2. Around half agreed that the facilitator requirements were appropriate, although a number of providers suggested there should be more flexibility around the requirement that facilitators hold a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, including recognition of equivalent or higher qualifications.

Interactions between RMS, train-the-trainer providers and SDC providers

Communication between RMS and providers of coach training (train-the-trainer) was efficient and effective. Limited training opportunities, primarily because training is delivered in Sydney, was identified as an area for improvement. Some providers suggested that offering more courses in regional areas would address the burden of expenses associated with travel, accommodation and losing income for a few days.

Train-the-trainer course structure, content, and delivery

The evaluation found mixed effects of facilitator and coach training (train-the-trainer). Some providers indicated that the train-the-trainer course adequately prepared facilitators and coaches to deliver the SDC; however, over half of providers felt that the training had some shortcomings. These included questions regarding content about the practical aspects of delivery (including time management, facilitation/coaching techniques, and

administration), as well as competency based assessment. In contrast, facilitators and coaches found the training effective.

Surveys of facilitators and coaches found that 95 per cent of facilitators and 93 per cent of coaches reported feeling either “very prepared” or “somewhat prepared” to deliver Module 1 and 2 respectively. The majority found the background information about young drivers adequate for facilitating the SDC (90 per cent of facilitators and 95 per cent of coaches); and most reported finding the information about course content adequate as background for facilitating the SDC (82 per cent of facilitators and 92 per cent of coaches).

Train-the-trainer course cost and business rules

Several providers indicated that the cost of train-the-trainer was high. The cost of train-the-trainer was found to be cost-prohibitive for refresher training for those that do not regularly deliver the Course. More than half of all providers noted that the requirement for trainers to deliver respective modules at least once every six months or undertake training again, may not be sufficiently sensitive to individual trainer’s level of experience and competency. They suggested a number of possible refinements to processes for maintaining currency and fluidity of delivery, including: reviewing the period of inactivity permitted; taking into consideration previous duration and density of SDC participation; introducing competency-based assessment; mentoring and shadowing alternatives; and charging a reduced fee for refresher training.

5.8 Position of the SDC in young driver safety initiatives

Stakeholder perspective

Stakeholders argued that the principles upon which the SDC was developed provide a good basis for identifying it as a cornerstone of broad educational efforts for young driver safety. The SDC was characterised as setting the scene for a more comprehensive modernising of this system, such as integrating the course into a broader design of the learning stages involved in acquiring a full licence using state-of-the-art resources and approaches. Stakeholders also noted that there is an opportunity to improve the resources that are available to driving instructors, supervising drivers and young drivers themselves.

Provider perspective

A couple of providers indicated that the SDC should be a part of a suite of measures for improving driving safety. Several suggested that it should be adapted and made available to other groups, notably supervising drivers, older learners, and immigrants.

Parents/guardians of SDC participants

Only 13 per cent of parents/guardians of SDC participants indicated they participated in the supervising driver workshops (Helping Learner Drivers Become Safer Drivers workshop); however, 85 per cent of those parents that attended indicated that they found it useful. This suggests there is an opportunity to improve reach or access of this workshop to complement the learning objectives provided by the SDC.

6 Limitations

Challenges in recruiting novice drivers who did not complete the SDC led to smaller than expected participant numbers for this group, and respondents may not be representative of the non-participant population. Therefore, findings related to non-SDC participants should be treated with caution. In addition, the different recruitment strategy for SDC participants and non-SDC participants means that comparisons between the two groups should also be treated with caution.

Self-reported data is subject to errors of recall and reporting. Nonetheless, it is the most appropriate approach for assessing attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and subjective experience, which are of central importance to process evaluation.

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