

Improving New Zealand's Graduated Driver Licensing System

The Government is making changes to the driver licensing system to reduce barriers to getting a full driver licence, while supporting road safety outcomes.

What's changing

1. Removing the full licence test

Once a driver has completed their restricted licence period, they will be able to apply for their full licence without needing to sit another test. The hazard perception part of the full test will move to the restricted test to make sure drivers are tested on this important skill.

2. Increasing the learner licence period for under 25s

The learner licence period for under 25s will increase from six to 12 months, giving learners more time for supervised driving practice. Drivers can reduce their learner period back to six months by completing a specified number of practice hours or an approved driving course.

3. Setting standard restricted licence periods

The restricted licence period will be 12 months for under 25s and six months for over 25s, with no option to reduce it with a defensive driving course.

4. Encouraging safe driving

Drivers who receive demerit points while on their restricted licence will have their restricted period extended by six months. Demerit offences are infringements issued by a police officer. Currently, infringements issued by safety cameras do not have demerits attached.

5. Introducing a zero-alcohol limit for all learner and restricted drivers

The current zero-alcohol limit for drivers aged under 20 years will be extended to include all drivers on a learner or restricted licence, regardless of their age.

6. Reducing the number of eyesight tests

Currently drivers have their eyesight checked at every licence application (learner, restricted and full) and every licence renewal. Drivers will now only need their eyesight checked when they apply for their learner licence and then each time they renew their licence (typically every 10 years). Requirements for drivers over 75 years old remain the same.

7. Improving NZTA's oversight of approved driving course providers

NZTA approves driver training courses that help people get licence endorsements or let them move through the system quicker. The changes will give NZTA more ability to consider whether the providers of these courses are suitable.

When the changes will happen

Most changes will come into effect on 25 January 2027.

The zero-alcohol limit for all learner and restricted licence drivers will require a legislative amendment and will come into effect at a later date.

Reasons behind the changes

Removing the full licence test

New Zealand is one of few places to require a practical test to gain a full licence (full test).

Most countries do not have a full test but often impose tougher restrictions or lower offence thresholds for drivers on learner and restricted licences.

The Government is removing the full test and introducing mitigations to maintain safety outcomes, like the clean driving record requirement at the restricted stage.

Removing the second practical test will make it cheaper to get a full licence. It will also make it easier, as long as people drive safely while on their restricted licence.

It is important the new system balances access and safety.

Changes to the learner and restricted periods

Young drivers are over-represented in road crashes. In 2024, 16-24 year-olds made up 12 percent of licensed drivers, but were responsible for 23 percent of fatal and serious injury crashes. 74 people died in crashes where a young driver was at fault.

A longer learner period means young drivers will have more time to gain the skills and experience needed to drive safely before getting their restricted licence.

The changes will rebalance the licensing system, making sure learners can get more supervised driving experience before driving on their own, without extending the overall time to go from a learner to a full licence. If a driver progresses as quickly as possible and takes the option to reduce their learner period, they will still be eligible for their full licence at 17 and a half years old.

New Zealand will be closer to international standards

Most Australian states and territories have a 12-month learner period for young drivers (New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania). Logged supervised driving hours are common in the Australian system. Almost all Australian states and territories (other than Northern Territory) require a minimum number of supervised driving hours for learner drivers.

No changes for most 25s and over

Drivers aged 25 and over will still have a minimum of learner and restricted period of 6 months each. They will no longer have the option to reduce their restricted period by completing an advanced driving course. Very few drivers 25 and over were taking this option: in 2023, 97 percent took more than 6 months to go from their restricted to full licence.

Demerits in the restricted period

Demerit points will add 6 months to the restricted period.

This clean driving requirement is designed to encourage inexperienced drivers to drive safely, or risk having to spend longer on their restricted licence.

This approach means drivers who break the road rules will not be able to get their full licence until they have shown they can drive safely and responsibly for an extended time.