

## Driver competency standards

The driver competency standard underpins the new driver training and licensing system which aims to produce safer drivers on Western Australia's roads.

The driver competency standards specify the attributes of safe driver performance and behaviour in relation to **light, heavy and multi - combination vehicles**. The standards become the foundation for both training and assessment.

This is a version of the standard in plain English. The main driver competency standard follows the rather rigid format used by the vocational education and training sector for defining competence. This can make competency standards difficult documents to use.

Licensing services wishes to make the information in the driver competency standard available widely so it has also produced this version in plain English.

### Using the standard

The driver competency standard is the foundation for the practical driving assessment, so it will be particularly useful for anyone teaching a person to drive. Professional driving instructors can use it to develop checklists of learning points and devise comprehensive training programs.

Professional driving instructors will find the standard contains much detail which explicitly describes the performance which licensing services requires from drivers. Units 1 to 4 will be most relevant when preparing students for the practical driving assessment. Instructors working with beginning drivers will also find that the standard is a valuable source for assessing a student's progress and for evaluating whether a driver is ready to attempt the formal assessment with licensing services.

Instructors working in post licence driver training can also use much in the driver competency standard. Organisations implementing safe driving policies can adopt the standard for establishing baseline performance for their drivers. They can use it to run diagnostic assessment and subsequent training for personnel who do not perform to the standard.

The standard will also be valuable for setting appropriate content in training for experienced drivers. In this regard the standard contains important warnings in unit 5 about teaching advanced control skills. Finally, the standard can help post licence trainers devise training content and objectives that address components pertaining to drivers' values, thinking styles and motivation.

### Competency standard for road safety

Competency standards exist as tools for training and assessment in the workplace. National industries have standardised the way they define jobs by adopting competency standards. Trainers in industry workplaces use standards to develop and deliver training programs and assessors use them to judge people's work performance and competence.

The authors of the driver competency standard used the principles of the industry model but have not followed them to the letter because there are limits to applying an industry approach to the task of driving. In the workplace many environmental factors combine to regulate how an individual will perform their job and role in the enterprise. Those regulating factors are not always present for drivers generally.

The driver competency standard differs from an industry model because it has to describe a self guided activity. Even when people are driving at work, they are operating independently. They choose how they drive and they choose the level of risk to which they expose themselves.

So it is that a person's behaviour—what they choose to do—is critical when it comes to discussing the notion of driver's competence and how to assess it. Behaviour results from many things, especially experience, the values and beliefs formed while gaining that experience, and the mental programs' (used for guiding responses) that come from repeated and varied experience.

There are two dimensions to safe driving: the skill to drive safely and the will to do so. A useful way to account for this is to say driving has both hard and soft components.

The hard components are relatively easy to grasp and teach; they include basic physical skills and applying the road rules. The soft components, in contrast, are very difficult to define, but they play a critical role in influencing whether a person wants to drive safely. They include values, emotions and personal needs.

Because of the critical role that soft components play in a self regulated activity such as driving, the authors have made a serious attempt to confront the issue and have included performance criteria that reflect soft components. Units four and six in this standard contain elements that relate to the most critical soft components of driving.

## Designing competency standards

Competency standards specify performance. They do not concern themselves with how people learn to achieve that performance. A well-written standard attempts to capture an overall picture of a role or function. In this picture the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts.

### So what is competence?

Competence could be said to be a set of attributes possessed by a person who is able to perform a role or function.

The attributes enable people to:

- perform at an acceptable level of skill;
- organise their tasks;
- respond and react appropriately to the unexpected;
- perform a range of activities to fulfil a role in a specific occupational area; and
- transfer skills and knowledge to new situations (National Training Board, 1992).

Although licensing services is using a competency standards approach for nominating the attributes of driver performance and behaviour, it has adapted the approach to meet the specific needs of road safety objectives.

The driver competency standard reflects this notion of attributes possessed by the operator.

### Experienced drivers use well developed:

- control skills;
- mental programs for interpreting and responding to events automatically'; and
- motivations which activate and direct safe behaviour and anticipate problems.

Readers should not see the standard as a set of competencies'. Rather, assessors use the standard as a basis upon which to judge whether the people they assess are competent'. Again, the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts.