



DSA®

Driving Standards Agency: how the use of National Occupational Standards will lead to safer, more competent drivers

Background

The Driving Standards Agency (DSA) is responsible for setting National Standards for all driving and riding and ensuring that all driver/rider training links to those Standards. It employs 1900 examiners and currently accredits around 44800 Approved Driving Instructors (ADIs).

As part of the Government's Strategic Framework for Road Safety the DSA is harmonising its Standards with the National Occupational Standards (NOS) so that they fully underpin all aspects of driving related training. The DSA is keen to ensure that this places no additional burden on industry and will be consulting on its proposals.

Recognising the role of NOS

UK roads are some of the safest in the world and ADIs play a key part in that. Senior Education Adviser, Ian Holden, who has worked for the DSA for three years, says:

“It is vital to acknowledge that lots of what ADIs do now is good. They must not feel they have to stop doing the good things they do. But we do want to provide a framework in which they can develop their skills and become even better trainers.”

The DSA began developing its Standards by commissioning competence frameworks for car drivers (Cat B) and motorcycles/scooter riders (Cat A/P). Full Cat B and Cat A/P Standards were published in January 2010.

The next stage was to identify the competences an ADI would require to deliver those Standards. In carrying out this work Ian recognised that the DSA's structure mirrored the NOS structure, on which educational qualifications are built.



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Intelligence > Investment > Impact

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills is a Non-Departmental Public Body providing strategic leadership on skills and employment issues in the four nations of the UK. Together, our Commissioners comprise a social partnership that includes CEOs of large and small employers across a wide range of sectors; trade unions and representatives from the Devolved Administrations. Our mission is to work with and through our partners to secure a greater commitment to invest in the skills of people to drive, enterprise, jobs and growth.

Unifying standards

There are currently no formal ADI qualifications – they qualify through internal DSA examinations. As a result, for example, somebody who qualifies as an Army driving instructor cannot immediately become an ADI.

“This is because we don't have a common set of standards against which to assess somebody who qualifies elsewhere. They must go through our entire process again. What I have been doing is working with the Sector Skills Councils to bring our Standards and the existing NOS together to provide a currency which will allow us to carry out that sort of assessment.”

Working closely with key stakeholders, the DSA has built a Standards structure which uses language well understood by all parties. As Ian says:

“That common language – knowing what ‘competences’ and ‘levels’ mean – something we haven't had before, means we can all understand where the other is coming from. The NOS framework can give us a language that all parties understand and, within which we can specify our standards and define what it means to be ‘competent’. Importantly, it gives us a language which is transparent into other area.

“For example, an ambulance paramedic, whose competencies are mostly in health, may also be required to drive to a very high standard. There is nothing to be gained by Skills for Health spending time developing driving standards if they could quickly draw on a set of driving related NOS. With such a structure there can be mutual understanding between agencies, the process can be completely transparent and everyone will know exactly where they stand.

“Once the DSA's Standards have been harmonised with the NOS any driving related task can be based around a Standard that the outside world will recognise as a NOS. The DSA, in turn will have confidence that anybody who meets the requirements of those NOS will be competent to deliver the level of training they are undertaking.”

How NOS will affect the DSA

NOS will, Ian believes, have a positive affect on the DSA:

“With clearly defined Standards quality control is much easier. Embedding our work within the NOS framework should result in an improvement in Standards and greater transparency of those Standards. The public is entitled to expect good quality from all service providers. Information about service provision and quality of service should be freely available. Customers should receive value for money, be confident that their health and wellbeing is paramount and that service provision delivers public good. The DSA believes that its approach will support the delivery of these outcomes. Ultimately they believe that this approach will mean that there will be safer, more competent drivers on the roads.”