

The Children Of The Revolution

As I sit down to write this month's feature, I'm mulling over all the views I've heard and read in respect of the recently published DSA consultation document on a new UK strategy for the training and testing of drivers. Most people say the publication was a missed opportunity to move things forward and now expect a long drawn out debate, followed by the inevitable problems that arise with the implementation of any future reforms. ADIs, on the other hand, want a better standard of living and a more structured framework to improve the safety of their pupils - sooner rather than later. They need clear guidance on how to best use their knowledge and skills to ensure their pupils are safe for life, rather than simply helping them pass the driving test.

To me, the word 'consultation' gives the illusion of participation whilst obscuring the fact that decisions have not been made. What we have here is a 'washing machine' approach in which decisions about how to train and test drivers are going round and round, but remain unresolved. The fundamental concern for the industry is that government departments seem unwilling to invest and consistently lack enthusiasm and motivation, to revolutionise the way things are done.

The Enigmatic Visitors

In April 2005, I received a mysterious phone call from someone wanting to discuss 'a proposition'. After signing a non disclosure agreement, my curiosity was aroused and, somewhat reluctantly, I agreed to a meeting - but I was in no rush. Six weeks later, when I met (what turned out to be) the three founders of a2om, it was immediately obvious that their business model to build a new driver education academy was remarkable. For the first time in my professional career, I saw an opportunity to make a difference to how people learn to drive by



providing all the skills and knowledge learners need to be safe. Without hesitation, I joined and began recruiting talented individuals to bring our plans to fruition and design a curriculum with the Goals for Driver Education (GDE) framework at its foundation. Unlike what's apparently taking place with the UK government, or not as the case may be, we were willing to invest, as well as having the enthusiasm and motivation to revolutionise the way things are done.

Revolutions come and go. Some succeed, some fail, but the ones that prevail are characterised by three 'e's:

Energy - to overturn the status quo: the revolution's 'heartbeat'
Empowerment - in other words, the creation of the 'tools' of the revolution
Enrolment - the rallying of like-minded opinion leaders to the cause

Revolutionary Energy

a2om has developed the first driving course in the world that delivers a wholly research-based curriculum with the GDE as its corner stone. It exceeds the recommendations of the DSA's consultation document, broadening the learning experience to ensure novice drivers understand a diverse array of road scenarios and conditions,

whilst developing a more mature way of thinking about driving in traffic. Overconfidence - that tends to develop just prior to and after taking the driving test - is combated by assessing attitudes, coaching learners and post-test training. As directed by the GDE competency framework, risk management techniques for life are developed through a process of self-evaluation. In addition, there are three unique features within the curriculum:

Attitude: We all have different attitudes about driving - but some people's attitudes differ from the norm more than others. On enrolment and, again, after passing their driving test, every student completes an online assessment designed by researchers at Cranfield University. The assessment measures several key attitudinal and motivational factors in driving as well as learning styles - so that tutors can coach more effectively and pupils understand how their attitudes affect their driving behaviour.

'a2om attitude' was first used in 2006 and, with imitation being the sincerest form of flattery, I am delighted to see that the DSA Consultation includes the introduction of an online 'attitude advisor'.

Mind: exclusively developed by a2om and the University of Waikato, it uses a PC interface

requiring responses to footage of real driving situations, including night driving and different weather conditions. Hundreds of hours of synchronised film from 4 cameras show events in the rear-view mirror, wing mirrors and the road ahead, making it vastly superior to the Hazard Perception Test. There's much more to it than clicking on a hazard, and recent research from Waikato University has shown that the programme improves the development of executive functions such as reaction time to hazards.

Highway: designed in collaboration with industry pioneers in e-learning, 'highway' provides a complete on-line experience to manage students as well as presenting highly engaging interactive e-learning content to educate pupils about the risk factors in driving to supplement in-car lessons.

Feeling Cynical?

I know what you're thinking: 'That's lovely for you - but most pupils and parents couldn't give two hoots about going through an enriching curriculum like this'. People want to pass the driving test as soon as possible and as cheaply as possible, and with the government standard on testing being set so low, why would people want to take part? After all, how difficult is it to drive a car?!

This narrow view of the skills of driving is a culture we are all familiar with, and enhanced by the government's apparently outdated approach to the training and testing of drivers.

Call Me Comrade

The next stage in motivating everyone to take part in this curriculum, including parents, pupils and ADIs, is through the development of the UK's first recognised qualification in driving - the BTEC in Driving Science. By wrapping the core elements of a2om's 'safe driving curriculum' inside a qualification, there are persuasive benefits for all parties. First, many parents will be motivated to sign up because



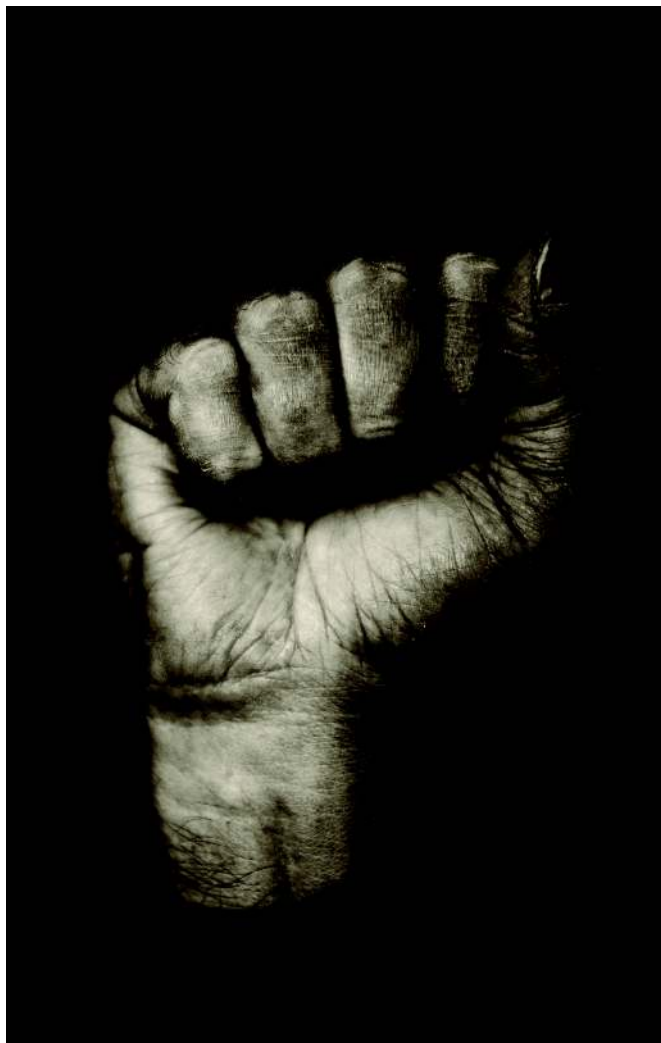
they want their kids to acquire sufficient qualifications to prepare them for the world of work. What better for a future employer than a qualification to show that this applicant will drive their company vehicle carefully? Secondly, many pupils will be motivated to do the BTEC because at the time of learning to drive they are already in exam-taking mode, often studying for GCSEs, 'A' levels or degrees. Why not turn the learning-to-drive process into another opportunity to acquire a qualification that will not only improve their CV, but one that may also extend their life? Finally, ADIs benefit from gaining access to the structured GDE-derived BTEC curriculum, into which they can incorporate their usual lessons. ADIs will also receive extra income because pupils will have to come back for post-test training. Oh and by the way, the BTEC would also mean that your pupils would be safer drivers because of increased levels of training and in-car driving experience. As a further incentive for ADIs, you will receive £30 for each pupil officially enrolled on the course. To ensure participating ADIs are up to the high standards required of the BTEC course for mentoring pupils, an intensive training programme has been created.

After the one-day CPD course, an ADI will be qualified to deliver the BTEC and assess a pupil's progress. It's also likely that new pupil enquiries will be referred to appropriate participating ADIs in the area.

What's In It?

In sport, there is a foundation of different scientific issues that underpin the act of scoring a goal or winning a race. In the same way, competent and safe driving is a skill that can only be fully developed when a driver understands the underpinning scientific knowledge. By virtue of going through this curriculum, pupils will gain a better appreciation of the risks involved in driving.

Examples of the course content



include driver behaviour and increasing self-awareness of the personal characteristics that increase the risk of a crash; risk management; crash statistics and the causes of a crash; the physics of a crash, including momentum and centrifugal force; environmental issues in driving; hazard perception training; and eye scanning skills to address the number one fault in the driving test - mirror checking. Journey planning is covered, as well as alternative transport and governmental policies, including road pricing and safety cameras. The content also addresses how changing lifestyles impacts on driving and attitudes to car ownership - a pivotal component in raising awareness in how to be safe for life.

Effective Wash Cycles

It's now exactly three years this month since my first meeting with the a2om founders. In that time we have developed what is generally considered the best driver education curriculum the world has ever seen, and we want as many people to benefit from it as possible. Also within the last three years, without wishing to undermine the recent efforts of Government departments, there appears to be little progress at the top, and it would be difficult to assume the machine has not broken down with the flood of novice driver KSIs littering the headlines. Despite all the talk about consultation, ADIs feel utterly powerless. Currently, they feel they have no choice but to train

drivers within an old-fashioned framework and an out-of-touch testing regime forever and ever, Amen. The promised reforms (if they ever appear) are always on the horizon and that's where they seem to remain. As the numbers of young people killed and seriously injured continues to worsen, we watch the washing machine of DSA decision-making go round and round year after year with very few, if any, successes to hang out on the line.

But you can't fool the children of the revolution - the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

It doesn't have to be this way. The best driving course in the world is now available to all ADIs via the BTEC.

Switch On, Tune In and Drive Out


The Revolution needs you and, historically, there have been many examples of how political regimes have been overthrown and transformed.

We really do have the power to change things from the bottom up, and instigate a revolution in driver education, it's just a question of belief. As Churchill once said 'A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty'. Even if just 10% of learner drivers enrol, it will be enough to make an impact on this most vulnerable driver group. This kind of ground swell will almost certainly force a change in the government's inertia.

Comrades unite, register your interest in the BTEC and get the powers that be in a spin. Improve your portfolio with the CPD, improve your income and, most importantly, improve our roads. We really can transform the current state of affairs and re-shape the future.

In the words of Francis Bacon: 'If we are to achieve results never before accomplished, we must employ methods never before attempted.'

It can all start with a click:

<http://www.a2om.com/btec> 

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