

IMPROVING THE DELIVERY OF ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION, TRAINING AND PUBLICITY

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1. THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

MVA Consultancy was commissioned by the Department for Transport (DfT) to undertake research amongst professionals responsible for the delivery of road safety education. The aim of the research was to identify best practice for maximising the effectiveness of delivering road safety education, training and publicity (RSETP). Any opinions we express in this paper are our own and do not necessarily reflect those of the DfT.

The research was carried out in the context of the Government's target to reduce the number of people killed and seriously injured in Great Britain in road traffic accidents.

The importance of child safety has become increasingly significant with the introduction of the Government's "Every Child Matters" programme and the Children's Act 2004. The Children's Act 2004 provides the legal framework for the programme of reform, which aims to ensure that every child and young person has the opportunity to fulfil his or her potential. Every Child Matters is the Government's vision for enhancement of the way in which professionals work together to provide children's care, bringing together all such professionals under the umbrella of a Children's Service. 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children (2004)' sets out five outcomes that services (including education) should work towards and achieve. One of the five outcomes identified is 'staying safe' which is fundamental to road safety and education.

Furthermore, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) framework for inspection, which came into effect on 1 September 2005, requires schools to demonstrate how provision for the five outcomes – including staying safe – is being made. One element of the inspection requires head teachers to complete a self-assessment form, which includes the key question 'to what extent do learners feel safe and adopt safe practices?' This further emphasises that road safety is implicit in the government's wider child safety agenda.

Local authorities in England differ in how well they meet their statutory responsibility to deliver road safety education, training and publicity. Most employ Road Safety Officers (RSOs) for this purpose. Research studies undertaken by TRL established that:

- the provision of RSOs and their resources varied widely across the country;

- RSOs have to balance the time spent on road safety education (RSE) with other responsibilities such as community travel and sustainable travel; and
- RSE is regarded as low status in relation to other areas of health and safety education and in relation to the wider area of road safety.

MVA is familiar with these views as they have been raised by some RSOs taking part in other work we are doing for the DfT managing a national pilot of child pedestrian training - Kerbcraft. Moreover, RSOs expressed concern that, whilst teachers perceive RSE as important, some do not consider it part of their remit to deliver or reinforce through classroom activity. This view was held even though road safety education now has specific reference within the National Curriculum guidelines for Citizenship.

Road safety training and publicity are integral elements of the education process. Too often, road safety only makes the headlines when a major incident attracts the attention of the media. Although 3,200 people lose their lives on Britain's roads each year, the attention this receives in the media is limited. RSOs have an important role to play in carrying out RSETP at the local level, supplementing national campaigns. One of the difficulties with road safety training is how to ensure that any education given in theory is easily transferable to the practical skills needed to remain safe on the road.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary aims of this project were to gain a greater understanding of the factors that influence the effectiveness of road safety ETP; to identify measures that are necessary to raise the quality, delivery and status of ETP; and thus to maximise effectiveness of ETP at a local level. One output of our study was to establish examples of best practice for publicity and training, to be disseminated, to educators and RSOs.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Following a review of previous research, we carried out a survey of road safety professionals and a survey of educators. We followed these surveys with qualitative research, including depth interviews with representatives of those two groups and their main partners in delivery. Following analysis of all data, a one day stakeholder workshop was held to discuss findings from the research and development recommendations for the future.

3.1 Road Safety Officers Survey

An online and paper based survey of Road Safety Officers (RSOs) was issued to 144 relevant local councils across England¹. It sought factual data about the role of RSOs and the resources available to them, as well as information about their work. It included attitudinal questions to elicit RSOs' views

¹ 35 County Councils, 36 Metropolitan Councils, 26 London Boroughs, 45 Unitary Authorities and 2 others. We are grateful to LARSOA for helping us compile our list of contacts.

regarding barriers to effective delivery of RSETP, and views regarding the status of Road Safety among those working in the field and those outwith.

Two separate questionnaires were developed - one for leaders or managers of road safety teams, and one for team members. In approaching the survey this way, we intended that single responses from each authority might be received from team leaders, which would allow information to be gleaned in respect of staff numbers, resources, management structures and other issues such as staff training and career opportunities.

Questions in the team members' questionnaire related less to management issues, and more to officers' experiences of delivering Road Safety Education (RSE). It also covered their background, qualifications and experience, perceptions of training and career opportunities available to them and, similar to the leaders' survey, attitudes regarding the status of road safety education from within and outwith the profession.

The questionnaire was to be completed online with the link to the survey web address issued to team leaders by e-mail, but people could request printed or e-mailed copies of the questionnaire if they chose not to use the online version.

Despite reminders, we achieved a lower than expected response, which was disappointing. We investigated the reasons for this low response rate. Discussions with RSOs during the telephone follow up exercise suggested that many officers had been preparing annual budgets at the time that the survey was distributed and the survey response deadline clashed with budget submission deadlines. In all cases, the budget had taken priority.

Many of those contacted also cited heavy workloads as a reason for non-participation – they simply did not have time to complete the questionnaire.

Finally, many of those consulted during the survey fieldwork period commented that they continually received requests to participate in surveys and that, for this reason alone, they had chosen not to take part. Regrettably, the survey was circulated at the same time as a similar survey and for some this had resulted in a choice between the two surveys, rather than taking part in both. This survey fatigue was also coupled with an expressed perception that little action was taken as a result of surveys issued to road safety professionals, which did not encourage people to take part.

3.2 The Educators Survey

Following the survey of road safety professionals, we contacted educators in 15 case study areas of England. The case study areas represented a broad mix of authorities in terms of the resources available for road safety education, based on feedback from the earlier survey. The research amongst educators covered those working in or with pre-schools, primary and secondary schools. The research amongst educators was to identify the extent to which they

viewed RSE as part of their remit to deliver or to reinforce, and its position in relation to other priorities, such as other parts of the PSHE curriculum.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Road Safety Officers' Survey

The survey data indicate that the school environment is the main domain in which officers work and that work with children and young people constitutes the largest proportion of their work. Child pedestrians and primary school children appear to be the main target priority groups for RSETP. School travel plans and initiatives such as walk to school week and in-school cycle training appear to be the main activities that staff are involved in co-ordinating and implementing. School-based work was also the most often cited example of good practice among both leaders and team members.

In a large number of cases, RSETP activities appear to be driven by school travel plans and the main partners who facilitate RSETP with children and young people are schools/colleges and other educational establishments. It seems that, for the most part, road safety professionals enjoy a close working relationship with schools. However, some of the qualitative responses suggest that RSOs do not perceive that they are taken seriously by some in the education realm. The group that was considered by RSOs to view road safety professionals least favourably was, however, engineers.

Training, and to a greater extent publicity, appear to take up less time and be given less priority status for those working in the field. However, many officers suggested that additional resources and staff time would help to grow these areas, especially publicity. Other areas that were considered to have developed in recent years were work with pre-drivers/young drivers, although many officers suggested that more needed to be done here.

A broad range of stakeholders were listed as working in partnership with RSOs and this was also seen to aid effective RSETP delivery. The police, health authorities and fire and rescue teams were all named as playing a key role in working alongside RSOs but the success of partnership working appears to vary across authorities.

It appears that RSETP is becoming more evidence-driven and many officers referred to the use of statistics and research in informing their work programmes.

Without exception, road safety professionals would welcome additional budget and additional staff resources to assist in both developing existing areas of work and expanding into new areas.

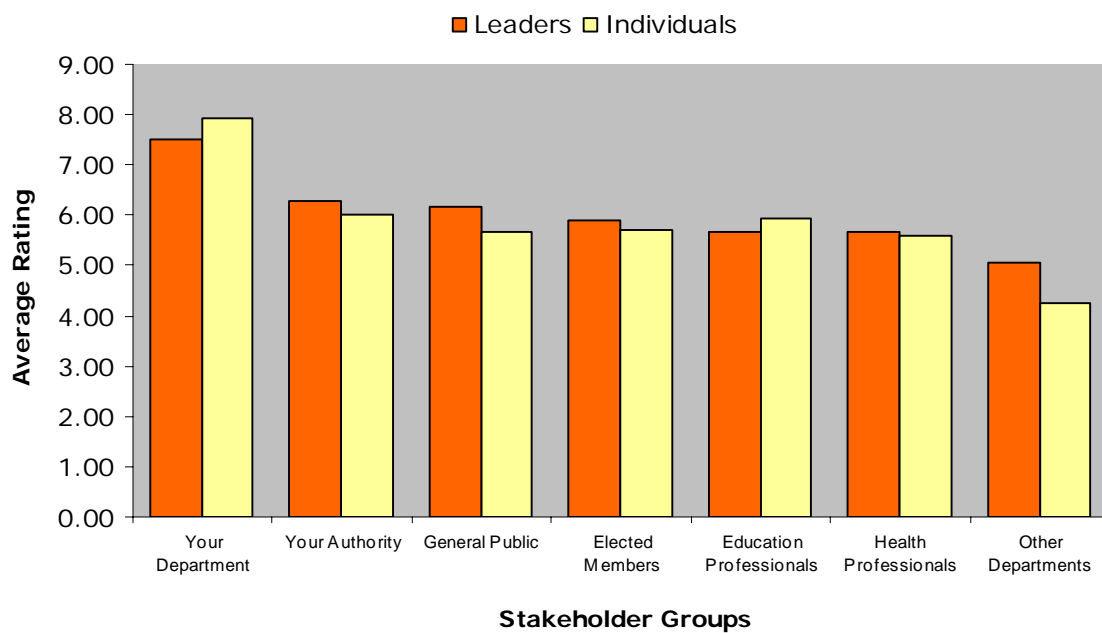
There does appear to be some level of frustration with the short-term nature of many of the road safety appointments and a general lack of available opportunities, especially for career progression, among road safety professionals. There were no real issues to emerge with regards to sickness

or absenteeism across authorities although responses from individual officers did suggest that better incentives may be required (for example, better pay, training and recognition of the value of their work) to encourage greater job satisfaction among existing staff. It appears that many of those currently working in the field find that the greatest reward for their work is the results that they achieve.

Finally, help from local and central government departments in raising the status of RSETP was also seen as something that was needed. This includes raising the profile of road safety among professional groups as well as among the public.

The figure below compares ratings between the two groups in relation to the extent to which RSETP was considered a priority for key stakeholders outwith the road safety profession.

Figure 1. Comparison of Ratings of Perceived Priority Status of RSETP among Key Stakeholder Groups



As the figure shows, in both cases, officers' own departments were considered the most likely of all stakeholder groups to view RSETP as priority area. Similarly, for both groups of respondents, other departments within their authority were considered least likely to view RSETP as a priority. There was little variation in the responses provided by team members and team leaders. That said, however, team members did indicate that they felt that their own department placed greater priority on RSETP than did team leaders, but the difference was small. In only one other case did team members provide a higher rating for a priority group than leaders, this being for educational professionals. In most other areas, there was a congruence of attitudes between leaders and team members.

4.2 Findings from the Educators Survey: Primary Schools

In primary schools, there appears to be consensus around the importance of effective RSE as an essential part of realising the Every Child Matters outcome of 'Staying Safe.' There was also consensus around the need for greater focus and frequency of RSE and the need for it to have a higher profile nationally.

Lack of skill or resources were cited as major barriers to the effective implementation of appropriate programmes of study. It was generally felt that resources should be more interactive and, if possible, web based. Primary Head teachers, it seems, feel there should be some published, progressive schemes of work with appropriate resources clearly outlined. Among classroom teachers, lack of resources and time were consistently cited as barriers to better RSE and a lack of parental support was mentioned intermittently.

Among classroom-based primary teachers, road safety messages appear to be generally basic, even simplistic. Some were strongly of the opinion that teachers should not be expected to design or deliver RSE.

Outside agency involvement was seen as central to improvement with some improved presentation skills and more interactive delivery. In terms of sustainable improvement, greater integration of RSE within the curriculum was highlighted as a key feature.

4.3 Findings from the Educators Survey: Secondary Schools

In secondary schools, there is a general focus of activity around Key Stage Three for RSE, with little provision at Years 12 and 13. Where there is input at a later stage, the focus is always on driver education, and is often linked with drug awareness. Education at this level is less practical or 'hands on' than primary education.

Most secondary heads felt there was room for improvement in the delivery of RSE. They cited improved resources, more 'government' or outside agency support and more time as key ingredients in realising this potential improvement. There was a negative response from both heads and secondary classroom based teachers about the importance of RSE in relation to other aspects of PSHE.

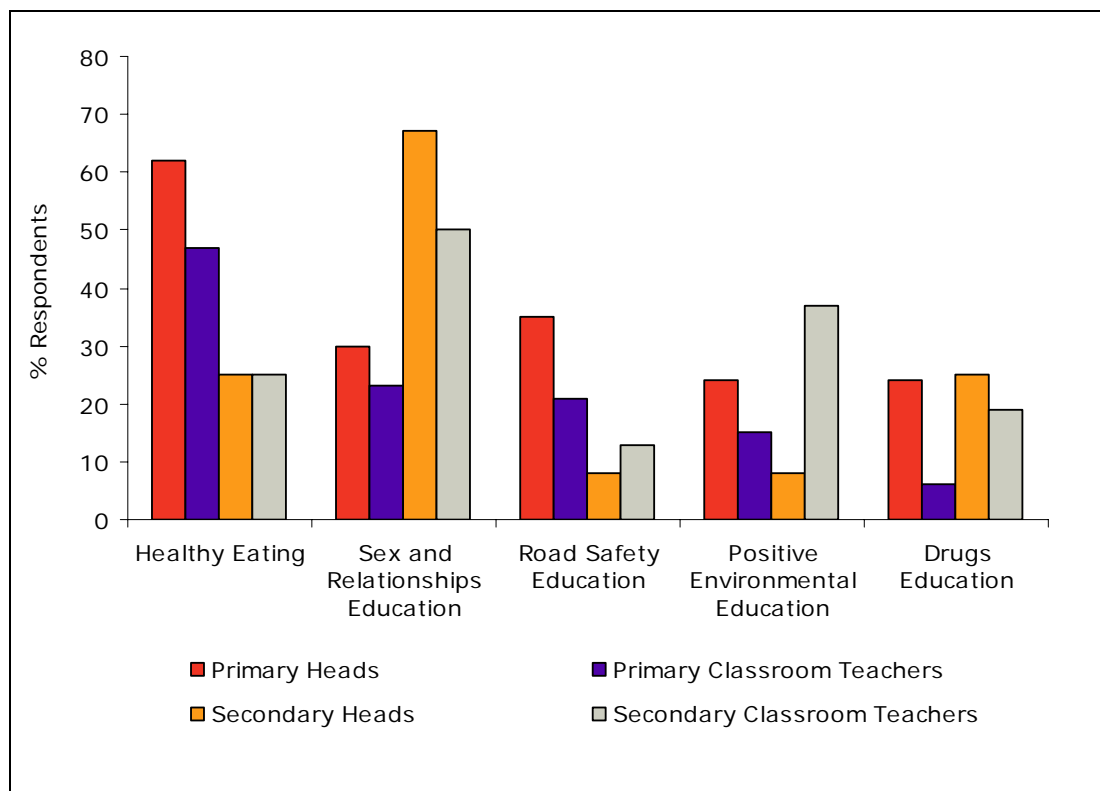
As with primary schools, it was generally felt that there were significant barriers to the effective delivery of RSE around a lack of appropriate resources and an overall lack of time for effective PSHE education. Comments from individual teachers again highlighted the need for more interactive resources that could raise the profile of associated dangers.

5. EMERGING ISSUES FROM THE SURVEYS

The RSO survey showed that officers mainly work in the school environment and that educating children and young people remains the largest area of activity to which time and resources are dedicated. Whilst the data from primary schools supports the notion that RSOs play a key role in school-based education, the lack of support for RSE as evidenced in the low levels of response and paucity of data provided by secondary school respondents does suggest that RSO efforts may not be being fully recognised or maximised.

There appear to be some notable differences in perceptions of RSE between primary and secondary schools in terms of the importance of RSE. The figure below provides a comparison of rankings provided by all teachers for the 'most important' aspect of PSHE.

Figure 2. Comparison of Rankings for the 'Most Important' Aspects of PSHE



For Primary Heads and Primary Classroom teachers, healthy eating appears to be high on the rankings of importance compared to other areas of the PSHE curriculum and this may reflect some of the recent political and commercial activity in this area. For both groups, however, RSE was also rated as being of secondary or tertiary importance compared to other aspects of PSHE and this shows that it is considered an important aspect of the primary curriculum both by school leaders and by those delivering education in the classroom. Indeed, there appeared to be reasonable congruence

between primary head teachers and classroom teachers in several aspects of their responses to the survey.

In comparison, secondary school head teachers and classroom teachers appeared to show support for RSE in relation to other aspects of PSHE and, with the exception of the aspect rated most highly (sex and relationships) these staff also appeared to disagree with one another about the secondary and tertiary importance of other aspects of PSHE. For head teachers drugs education was ranked highly whilst for secondary classroom teachers, positive environmental messages received greater support as the second most important of PSHE.

When looking at the average rating from across all four sets of respondents, sex and relationships education received the highest overall mean score for being 'most important' (42%), followed by healthy eating (40%), environmental education (21%), road safety education (19%) and drugs education (19%). This is useful contextual data in which to posit a need for more RSE activity in secondary schools since it may suggest that there are some attitudinal biases among educators regarding the place of RSE in secondary education that need to be overcome before RSE can be effectively delivered. Indeed, the RSO survey suggested that some officers did not feel that their work was taken seriously by educators. This appears to have been supported here.

There appears to have been little consideration of RSE with regards the Ofsted self-evaluation form, which suggests, perhaps, that it is not currently considered as being sufficiently integral to 'staying safe' by teachers. This might indicate that more work is required with teachers to promote the position of RSE in the wider safety agenda since it may, at present, be being overlooked as a topic of relevance.

In both this survey and the RSO survey, there appears to be a request for more national and local government support in guiding and directing the future of RSE and in facilitating its delivery through the provision of resources. In any case, there seems to be evidence for more open channels of communication between policy makers and practitioners in helping to push RSE higher up the education agenda.

6. CASE STUDIES

The survey showed that road safety education is an area which does not currently sit high on the agenda of either primary or secondary schools but, paradoxically, is an area that most teachers recognise as being of considerable importance and as integral to all stages of education, especially during younger years. There is evidence to suggest that partnership working could be improved to provide teachers with more support in delivering road safety messages as, in many cases, they simply do not feel confident at present to incorporate sufficient RSE into their own working agendas.

To explore this in more depth we undertook a programme of qualitative face-to-face consultation work with RSOs and others involved in the delivery of

health and safety education, including those heads and teachers who indicated in the survey that they were willing to take part. The purpose was to further explore the barriers to more effective RSE and develop strategies and recommendations for ways of changing the current situation, especially in secondary schools.

The case study interviews confirmed the perceived need for more CPD and career progression opportunities. Nationally recognised qualifications, competency frameworks and staff hierarchies would be welcomed. RSOs mainly work in schools - educating children and young people is a priority, but enthusiasm exists for expansion. The importance of access to interactive and other resources was also confirmed in the case studies.

RSOs and educators agree on the need for more guidance and direction from central and local government. They also highlight a need for improved communication channels between all practitioners. It appears that individual personalities and experience have a huge impact on success – police, fire and teaching staff work well with respective partner agencies. Greater networking offers potential as the way ahead – RSOs need to work with others to achieve maximum impact.

Among RSOs and Educators, there was consensus that Road Safety would only achieve a higher status at the local and national level if it was mainstreamed into areas of the existing curriculum and into local authority targets and budgets. Competing areas of the school curriculum mean that it is already overloaded and, without a national requirement to cover road safety education, there is a danger that it will continue to lose out to other areas of the PSHE agenda.

Among RSOs and other local authority representatives interviewed, there was a view that the future of road safety education lay in achieving match funding from partner organisations. Encouraging partners in delivery to match funding and contribute resources for specific campaigns at local level would involve RSOs in more actively trying to set up working relations where mutual gains can be achieved.

If available, it was agreed that additional funding would, perhaps, best be used towards increasing the visibility of road safety professionals in the community as well as promoting national campaigns.

7. PRACTITIONER WORKSHOP

The final strand of the research involved a stakeholder workshop carried out towards the end of the project involving road safety professionals and other key stakeholders. The purpose was to present the research findings and discuss the best ways of utilising the research findings to improve the delivery of road safety education. The workshop was also used as a forum through which draft recommendations were developed.

At the workshop, there was a general consensus around the research findings and agreement that a national approach to future thinking was required. Despite considerable inconsistency in current practice between areas, the importance of national standards and national drivers for change was recognised by all.

Attendees also agreed that, in driving forward, there was a need to remove the inherent assumption that raising the status of road safety education would necessarily improve the quality and delivery of the subject. Instead, all agreed that this was only a first step towards achieving change and that it needed to be complemented by a programme of actions, implemented at both local and national level.

A wider range of stakeholders attended on the day (including road safety officers, educators, publicists, central government representatives and emergency services staff) and all agreed that raising the status of RSETP involves engaging a wide audience. Crucially, this includes not only budget and resource decision makers and delivery professionals but also local communities. Capacity building is something that road safety professionals must take on board as part of their working roles and should be encouraged to alert others in the community of the ways in which they can enforce messages received through formal education.

On agreement of draft recommendations, it was noted that these should be implemented in the spirit of learning and rewarding road safety professionals for their enthusiasm rather than adopting a punitive approach. The key lessons from the work would be maximised only if those currently in the field did not feel that their previous commitment was being disregarded or challenged but that future changes would offer opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Finally, attendees stressed the need for future actions to be coupled with independent evaluation of changes introduced. Dissemination of good practice was considered to offer intrinsic reward to the staff who are fulfilling current road safety roles.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

A list of draft recommendations has been developed which are currently under consideration by DfT and may be subject to change. The main recommendations are:

- indexing and scrutiny of existing educational and publicity materials to ensure that the profession is releasing a unified message about what constitutes safe road and pedestrian behaviours;
- a nominated body to take on responsibility for dissemination activities;
- development of a clear and accountable partnership between the DfT and DfES with infiltration into Key Stages 3 and 4 as a priority;

- formalising the 'capacity building' role of RSOs through inclusion in job descriptions, training and targets; and
- introduction of a more transparent system for allocating funds at both the national and local level

9. CONCLUSIONS

In essence, the research would suggest that the quality of RSE delivery is variable across the country and the two key solutions to addressing this appear to lie in improved communication, clarity and systematicity in funding decisions and congruence of road safety messages and resource appropriateness as determined by DfT or an appropriate designated professional body.