

ABDO briefing document

Mandatory eyesight testing for drivers consultation

Consultation: Introducing mandatory eyesight testing for older drivers

Published: 7 January 2026

Consultation closes: 11 May 2026

Scope: Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales)

Executive summary

The Government has launched a consultation [on introducing mandatory eyesight testing for drivers aged 70 years](#) and over at licence renewal, with possible consideration of starting testing at a younger age.

ABDO supports the principle of improving road safety and recognises that drivers' vision is a critical component of any effective road safety strategy. As the professional body for dispensing opticians, ABDO is keen to contribute to the development of a framework that supports patients and eyecare professionals to work in partnership to ensure drivers achieve and maintain the best possible vision for safe driving.

ABDO members are well placed to contribute to the development of this framework. This briefing document summarises the key elements of the consultation proposals to support members in forming their views and providing feedback to ABDO, enabling us to develop our final response.

Key points:

- While many older people continue to drive safely, population-level data indicate an increased risk of collision and serious injury among older drivers, highlighting the importance of effective vision screening and vision correction as part of wider road safety measures. However, ABDO is seeking members' views on whether vision screening should be widened and mandatory for all drivers at driving licence application and at every licence renewal thereafter.
- In relation to a driver's vision, the UK currently requires a comparatively low level of regulatory assurance when set against international peers.
- Introducing vision screening at licence application and renewal would strengthen assurance that drivers meet the minimum vision standard, but it would not, on its own, ensure that drivers actually wear the appropriate correction every time they drive.

- In regard to funding any sight testing/vision screening, the consultation notes that free NHS sight tests are already available to many older adults. However, given existing capacity pressures and funding constraints within NHS sight testing services, this may not represent the most appropriate or sustainable delivery model for mandatory driver vision screening. ABDO is therefore keen to hear members' views on the use of the 'NHS sight test', or alternative delivery and funding models that could support effective implementation. We are keen to understand members' thoughts on whether any of the potential options would place additional strain on NHS services.
- Funding assumptions remain unclear and may not align with existing DVLA precedent. As drivers already meet the costs associated with driving and vehicle ownership, any sight testing/vision screening requirements should be considered in this context. ABDO is keen to hear members' views on appropriate and sustainable funding models.
- When responding to the consultation, it's important to consider whether drivers' vision should be assessed in a way that matches the level of risk, has proper clinical oversight, and involves checking vision throughout the whole time a driver holds a licence. Consideration should also be given about whether this kind of ongoing, clinically governed approach could lead to more effective and sustainable road-safety outcomes than the system which relies on a one-off, attendance-based test at licence renewal. We are also keen to hear members' views on how the expertise of dispensing opticians can be used within such a system

Current regulatory position (car and motorcycles, not including lorry drivers etc.)

At initial application, learner drivers do not have to undergo a formal clinical eyesight test as part of the application process itself — there is no requirement to attend an appointment with an eyecare professional. Instead, they are required to self-declare that they meet the minimum legal eyesight standards (eg read a number plate from 20 metres).

Ongoing drivers renew their photocard licence every 10 years until age 70 (which is an administrative process only). At age 70, and every 3 years thereafter, drivers self-declare eyesight and medical fitness. No healthcare verification is required unless a condition is declared or reported. The DVLA investigates notified cases and funds mandated medical investigations.

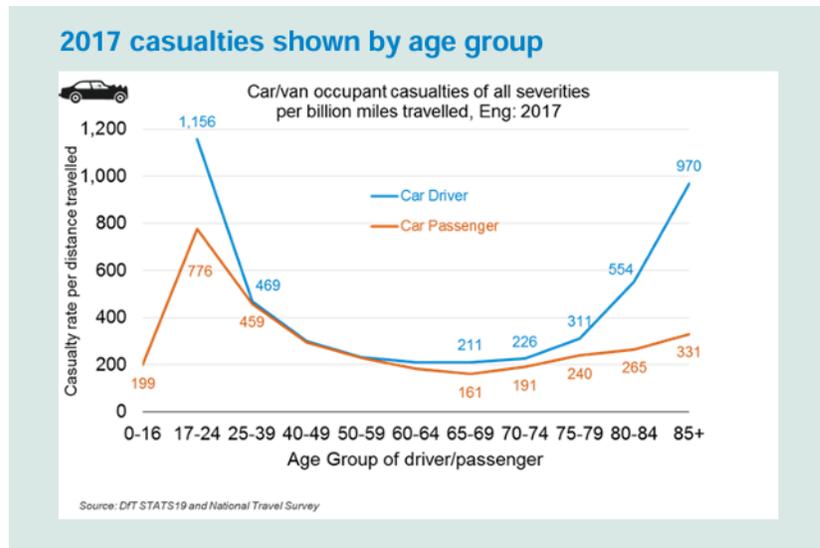
A driver under the current system may hold a licence throughout their driving life without ever being required to undergo a formal eyesight assessment as part of the licensing process.

Demography and risk

Drivers aged 70+ increased by approximately 60% between 2012 and 2025 (3.9m to 6.3m).

Approximately 450,000–500,000 drivers renew at age 70 annually.

Casualty risk follows a U-shaped curve: highest in younger drivers and rising again in older drivers. Consultation data confirm KSI (killed/seriously injured) rates are highest in 76+ drivers, except for drivers aged under 29.



Real-world compliance evidence

UK roadside screening (November 2024 “Is your vision roadworthy”):

- 3,010 drivers tested
- 1.7% failed the number plate test
- 3.2% received warnings or licence revocation
- 10.2% failure rate in drivers aged 81–90

This demonstrates measurable non-compliance on UK roads.

International comparators

Most European countries require formal eyesight testing at first licence application and/or at renewal, often with increasing testing frequency as drivers age (including Spain, Italy, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Norway). In contrast, the UK is unusual in continuing to rely primarily on self-declaration of compliance with vision standards.

Funding risks

The consultation implies existing NHS and private testing infrastructure may absorb demand. However:

- no dedicated funding model is defined

- NHS capacity is constrained – the present situation of ‘private sight test and dispensing cross-funding NHS sight tests’ could become even more unsustainable
- visual field testing is not routinely carried out or separately funded
- devolved systems vary significantly in the way they fund and deliver population sight testing

Test design and quality risks

NHS and self-funded sight tests assess visual acuity but not routinely visual fields.

‘Proof of attendance’ does not confirm ownership of spectacles, up to date spectacles, correction usage if prescribed for driving, task suitability or any form of compliance.

Non-clinical delivery of a ‘driving vision service’ risks downgrading quality and governance.

Age of commencement

The consultation allows consideration of starting testing at a younger age, enabling a proportionate ‘driving lifecycle’ approach that ABDO could promote.

Role of dispensing opticians

Dispensing opticians contribute to road safety by supplying appropriately prescribed and accurately fitted spectacles in accordance with the clinical prescription issued following a full eye examination. They provide advice on frame and lens choice, visual performance and adaptation, supporting drivers to safely meet the required visual standards for driving.

Member FAQs

1. What is being proposed?

Mandatory eyesight testing for drivers aged 70+, with possible earlier commencement.

2. When does the consultation close?

11 May 2026. ABDO would appreciate members’ feedback by Friday 3 April.

3. Why is ABDO reaching out to members on this issue?

ABDO is seeking members’ views because good vision is fundamental to safe driving and sits at the core of dispensing opticians’ professional expertise. Dispensing opticians have unique insight into how vision standards, appropriate correction and patient behaviour interact in real-world settings. Member feedback will help ensure ABDO’s consultation

response reflects practical experience and recognises the role dispensing opticians can play in improving road safety outcomes.

4. Who will pay for tests?

Currently unclear – ABDO is seeking members’ suggestions on funding models.

5. What feedback should members provide?

Practical delivery issues, patient compliance examples (reflecting a registrant’s duty regarding reporting to DVLA etc.), capacity concerns and safety risks.

6. How should members share feedback?

Please send your feedback to policy@abdo.org.uk with the subject line ‘**Driving consultation**’.