



THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF  
OPHTHALMOLOGISTS'  
**COLLEGE STATEMENT**

**Changes to Vision Standards for Driving**

There has been a period of uncertainty about how the recent European regulations (European Commission directive 2009/113/EC of 25 August 2009 amending Directive 2006/126/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on driving licenses) on driving and vision would be incorporated into UK law. The College is aware that information on this website related to vision and driving is overdue for an update, but has been awaiting decisions from the Department for Transport concerning vision standards before doing so.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2012 the DVLA website was updated to clarify the recent changes, regarding vision and driving.

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/dvla/medical/Vision%20changes%2001-05-2012.aspx>

This states that:

**Group 1 (cars and motorcycles):** applicants and licence holders, will need to have a binocular visual acuity (with corrective lenses if worn) of 6/12 (0.5 decimal) **as well as** being able to read the number plate from the prescribed distance.

**Visual field:** the present standard of a total field width of 120 degrees remains but **in addition**, there will need to be a field of at least 50 degrees to each side of the midline.

**Group 2 (buses and lorries):** applicants and license holders must be able to read the number plate at 20 metres and have a visual acuity, using corrective lenses if necessary, of at least 6/7.5 (0.8 decimal) in the better eye and at least 6/12 (0.5 decimal) in the other eye. If corrective lenses are worn, an uncorrected acuity in each eye of at least 3/60 (0.05 decimal) is needed. All Group 2 drivers must also meet all the Group 1 visual acuity standards as outlined above. Where glasses are worn to meet the minimum standard for driving, they should have a corrective power of no more than plus eight (+8) dioptries.

The European Directive has been discussed extensively at meetings of the Vision Panel which is one of the Secretary of State for Transport's Honorary Medical Advisory Panels. These panels are advisory only and the Vision Panel comprises ophthalmologists including RCOphth members, optometrists, lay members and other representatives. Minutes of these meetings are in the public domain on the DVLA website.

[http://www.dft.gov.uk/dvla/medical/medical\\_advisory\\_information/medicaladvisory\\_meetings/minutes.aspx](http://www.dft.gov.uk/dvla/medical/medical_advisory_information/medicaladvisory_meetings/minutes.aspx)

The final decision on vision standards for driving is the responsibility of the Department for Transport which considers information from a variety of sources.

In response to the recent European Directive, the Panel's advice was whilst the number plate does not have a Snellen Acuity equivalent it was a useful test and should be retained at 20m and if this test was failed to accept a visual acuity of 6/12 (decimal 0.5) as an alternative.

Panel's advice was considered but the Department of Transport decided that in order to comply with the EC regulations that the standard should be that both the number-plate test and a formal visual acuity of 6/12 would be required.

The European regulation also allows for the possibility that for group 1 drivers, licensing may be considered in "exceptional cases" where the visual acuity standard cannot be met provided that there is no other impairment of visual function, including glare, contrast sensitivity and twilight vision. The Vision Panel considered that it would be reasonable to allow 6/18 vision in such cases (which might for example include some patients with nystagmus and albinism), but currently the Department for Transport has not so far indicated that this will be acceptable.

Group 2 (e.g. lorry) drivers, now have to meet a slightly higher standard of 6/7.5 (0.8) in the best eye and (still) 6/12 (0.5) in the worse eye. Previously decimal 0.8 was pragmatically interpreted as 6/9, so the recent change applies the European Directive more precisely. The European Directive allows the possibility of lowering the visual acuity standard in the worse eye to 6/60 (0.1). This lowered standard was considered to be acceptable by the Vision Panel but it has not so far been accepted by the Department for Transport. The visual field standard for Group 2 drivers has not been changed.

The College understands that discussions will continue and it is possible that there may be further changes to the driving standards in the UK in the future. In the meantime the College notes that the 'At a glance guide' on the DVLA website has been updated. <http://www.dft.gov.uk/dvla/medical/ata glance.aspx>

### *How does this affect the current situation?*

#### Provisional Driving License

Details may be found at:

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/LearnerAndNewDrivers/LearningToDriveOrRide/DG\\_4022529](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/LearnerAndNewDrivers/LearningToDriveOrRide/DG_4022529)

In order for a first provisional license to be issued to an applicant they will need to confirm they can read a number plate (post 1st Sept 2001 font) from 20 metres and that they have not been advised by a doctor or optician that their eyesight does not meet the minimum standards for driving ("the standard"). If they subsequently fail the number plate test at the time of a Driving Standards Agency driving test, then notification of this is sent to DVLA

by DSA and the license would be revoked. It would be usual for the test candidate to be allowed three attempts, usually starting from greater than 20 metres, but the final chance if required will be measured accurately. An optometrist's certificate (to confirm the visual acuity is at least 6/12) is not required with an application, but this would be commissioned by DVLA if there were reasonable grounds to suggest this standard might not be achieved.

#### Current Group 1 License Holders

Drivers (current license holders) who are able to pass the number plate test would only be expected to notify DVLA if they are told by their doctor or optician that they do not meet the current eyesight standards (i.e. that their visual acuity is < 6/12). DVLA has notified a broad cross-section of doctors, opticians and optometrists of the new standards applicable from 1st May 2012 and up-dated the At a Glance Guide to the Current Medical Standards of Fitness to Drive so that their patients can be appropriately advised.

#### Renewal of Group 1 License

Current license holders applying to renew entitlement need to confirm that they can meet "the standard" quoted above. Again an optometrist's certificate would not be required, but DVLA would commission this if for some reason there is doubt as to whether the 6/12 standard is achieved.

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Vision Standards