

North Wales Older Driver Development Scheme 2017/18 Report

Introduction

Welsh Government's Road Safety Framework for Wales 2013 highlights older drivers (aged 70 and over) as a vulnerable road user group. The report states that Wales has, and is projected to continue to have, the most aged population in the UK. This causes a number of challenges, including implications for road safety.

Age related impairments suffered by older drivers fall into 3 key categories:

- Physical
- Cognitive
- Visual

Physical impairments include restricted mobility and joint movements. These impairments can have a detrimental effect on drivers' ability to carry out adequate checks of their surroundings, especially at junctions and roundabouts. Problems with joint movements can also restrict the drivers' ability to fully control the vehicle.

Cognitive impairments refer to an individual's ability to process information. It may take a longer period of time for an older driver to ascertain the speed and distance of another motorist compared to that of a younger driver.

Visual impairments, often inevitable with ageing, can have a detrimental effect on the driver's ability to view crucial road features such as signing.

Current Situation

The Road Safety Unit's across all North Wales Local Authorities are dedicated to reducing the number of road traffic accidents and casualties involving all road user groups, especially the more vulnerable road users.

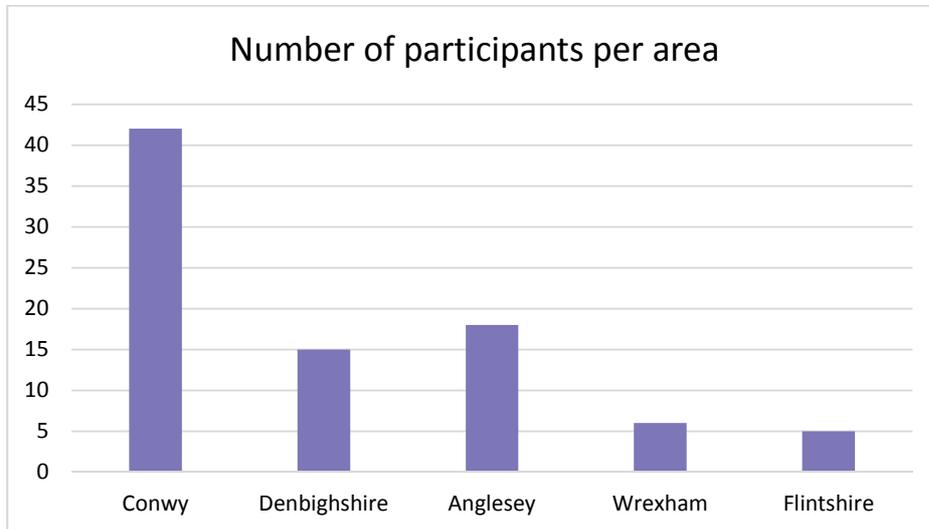
In 2017 there was a population of 694,826 in North Wales, of these 156,909 were aged 65 and over, equivalent to 23% of the population.

In 2016, 556 casualties in road traffic collisions in North Wales were aged 70 and over. Although this figure saw a 10% reduction for the same period in 2017, it still remains that more than 500 people aged 70 and over were injured or killed in road traffic collisions in North Wales.

In response to these figures, in April 2017, the Older Driver Development Scheme was introduced by the Local Authorities in North Wales: Conwy, Anglesey, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham. Aimed at older drivers aged 65 and over the scheme offers a 2 hour workshop followed by a 2 hour practical driving assessment from a trained driving instructor free of charge.

Similar schemes aimed at older drivers have been delivered by Local Authorities for a number of years but in April 2017 the scheme was developed in the Older Driver Development Scheme which provides a consistent approach to delivering the scheme to older drivers across North Wales and allows data to be collected and analysed to demonstrate the effectiveness of the scheme.

In Conwy, Anglesey and Denbighshire both the workshop and practical assessment are offered to drivers but in Wrexham and Flintshire only the practical assessment is offered. The data collected from the Older Driver Development Scheme in Conwy, Anglesey and Denbighshire show that the offer of a workshop session is attractive to older drivers as the take up is much higher, as shown in the graph below.



The aim of the scheme is to raise awareness of road safety issues which can affect older drivers and to encourage older drivers to give consideration to the physical, cognitive and visual changes that they may have experienced and the effect of these changes on their driving capabilities.

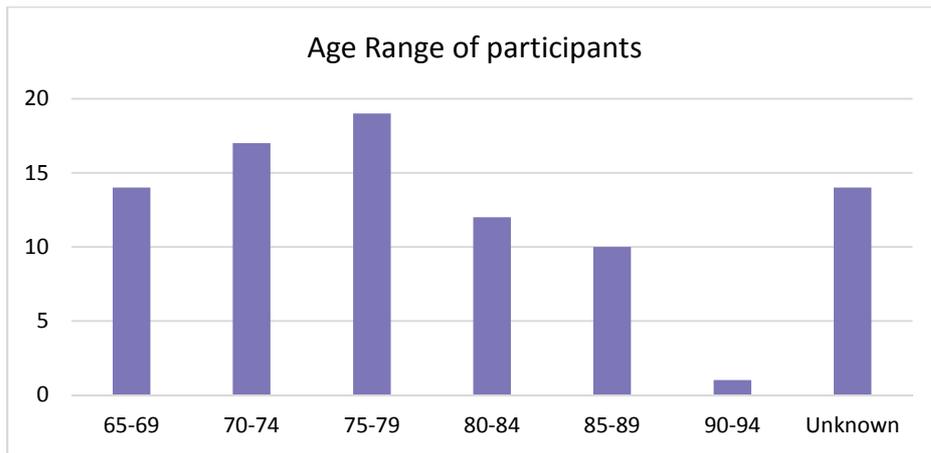
The workshop session provides an opportunity for important and relevant road safety topics to be discussed, including the elements of driving that will be assessed as part of the practical assessment. Discussions are held in a group session to put the participants at ease and ensure they get the most benefit from attending the course.

The workshop includes a discussion around the 'fatal 5', the 5 main causes of road traffic collisions and injuries in Wales: ensuring seatbelts are worn at all times, abiding by the speed limits, minimising distraction whilst driving, using mobile phones whilst driving and driving under the influence of drugs/drink.

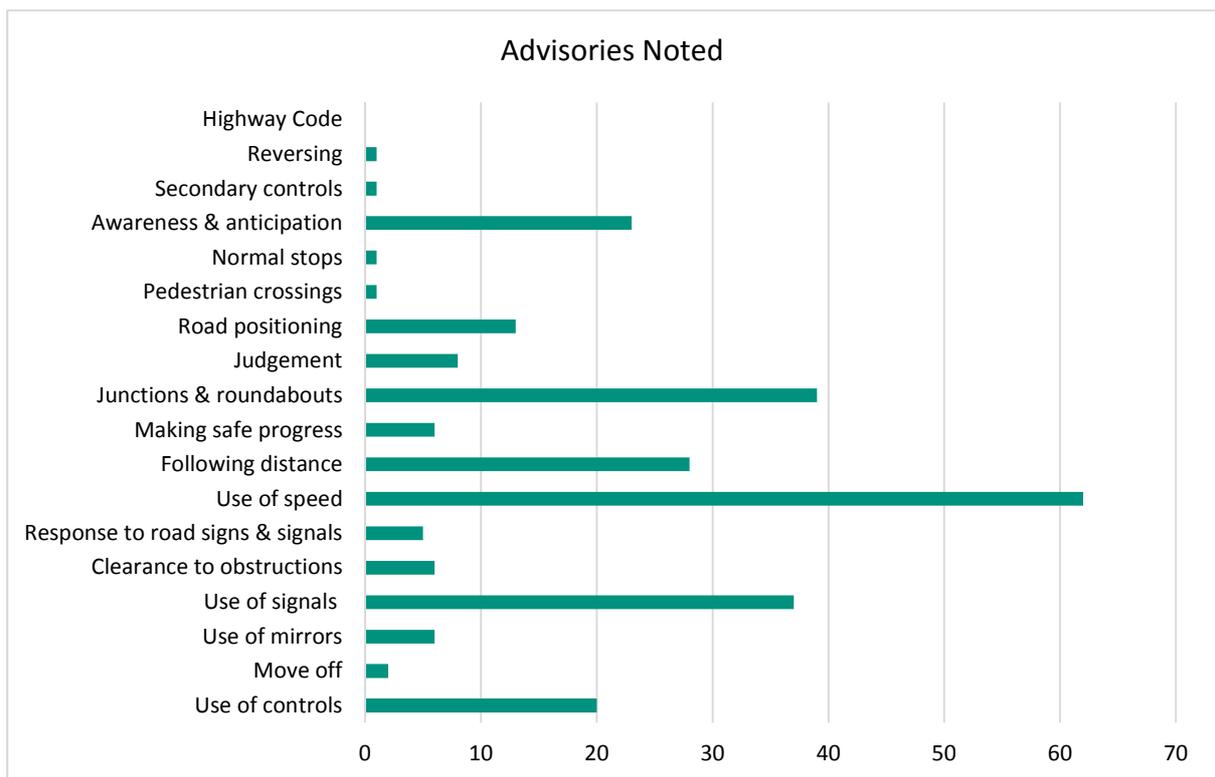
The driving assessment starts with a visual screening to assess whether the drivers vision is an appropriate level to safely operate a vehicle followed by an assessment of the drivers' abilities against 18 categories of driving skills.

2017/18 Older Driver Development Scheme – North Wales

Between April 2017 and March 2018 a total of 86 drivers signed up to the Older Driver Development Scheme in North Wales with the ages of participants ranging from 65 to 90, as shown in the graph below.

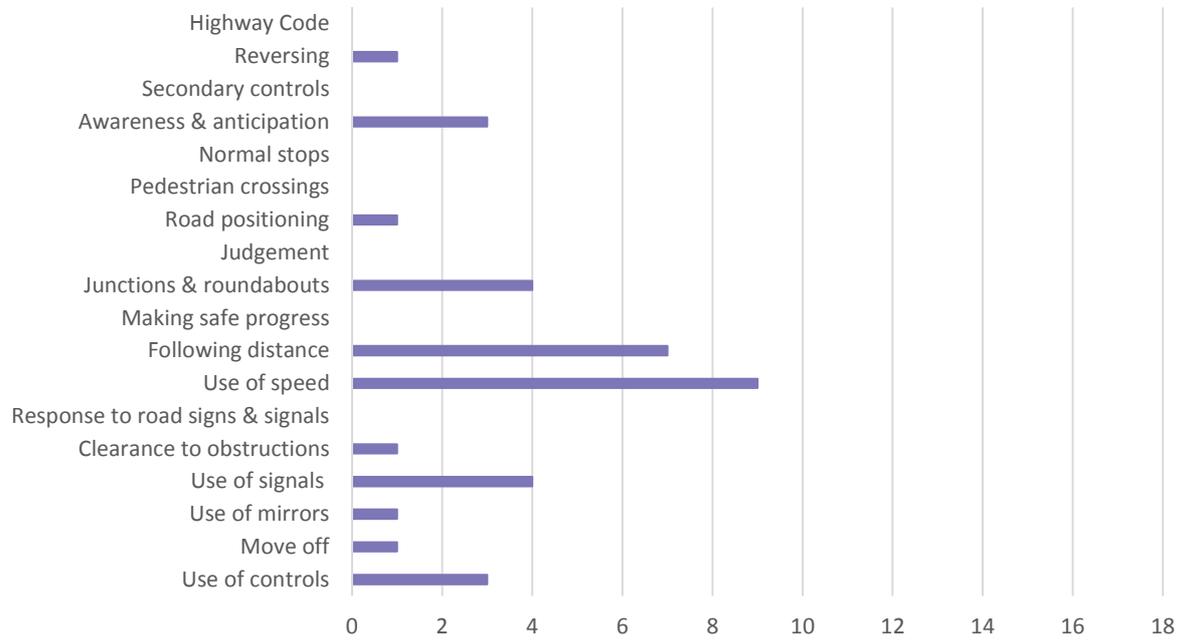


Throughout the assessments a total of 259 advisories were noted against the drivers' skills with the most common advisories noted in the areas of: use of speed, junctions and roundabouts and use of signals. Advisories were noted in most categories, with the exception of the Highway Code where no advisories were noted, as shown in the graph below. This information will enable the trainers to incorporate this into the workshop session and tailor the session to address these areas.

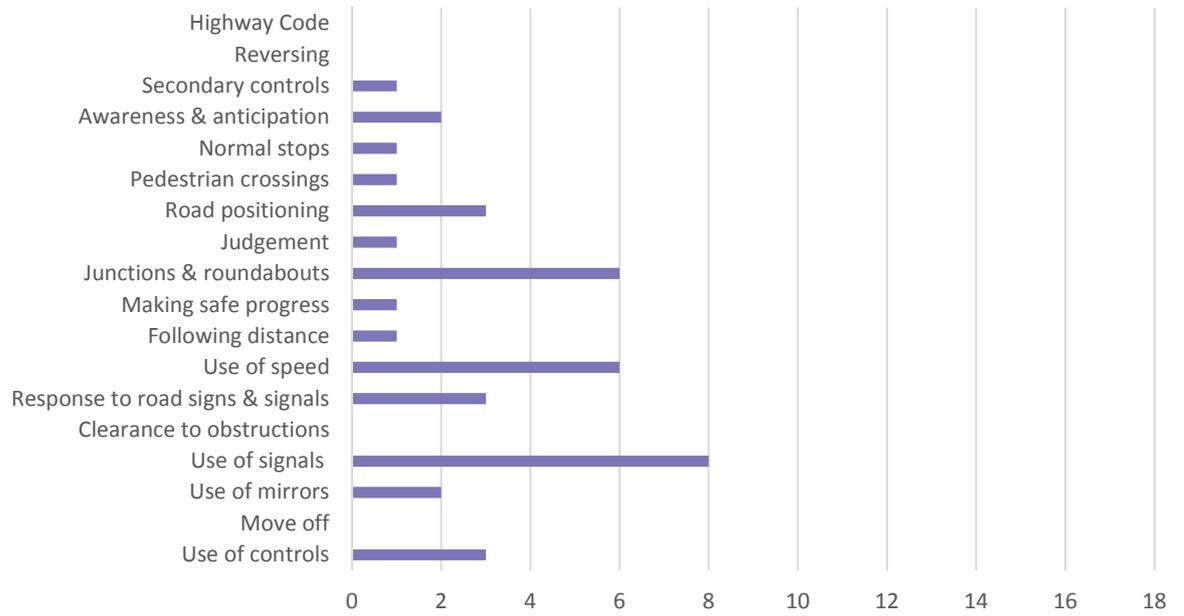


The graphs below show the categories where advisories were identified for each age group. The categories of use of speed, use of signals and junctions and roundabouts were common across all age groups.

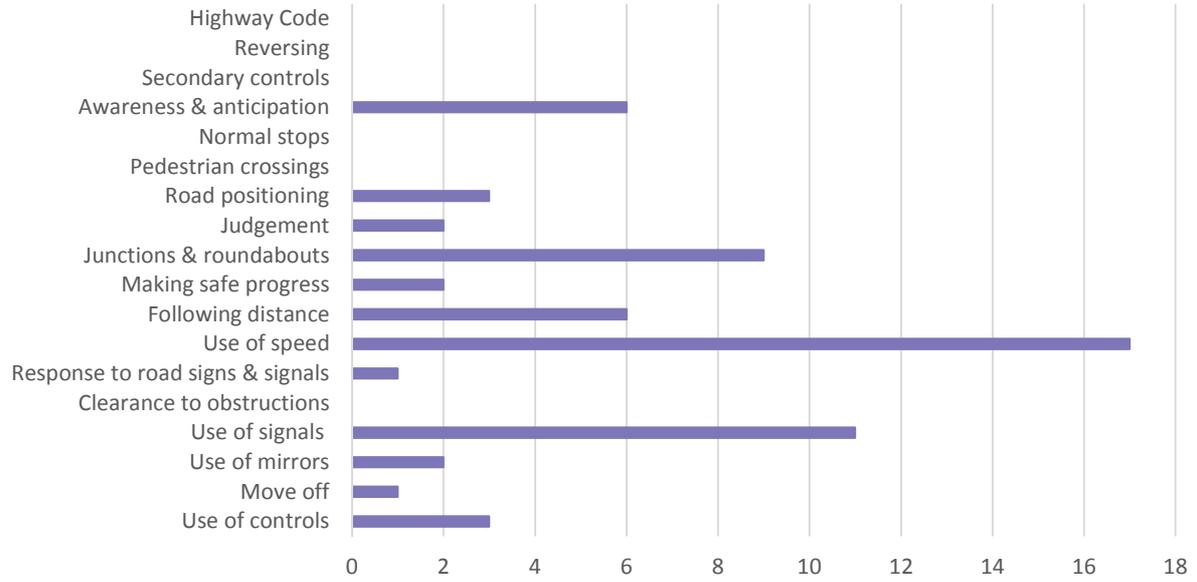
Advisories identified - age range 65-69



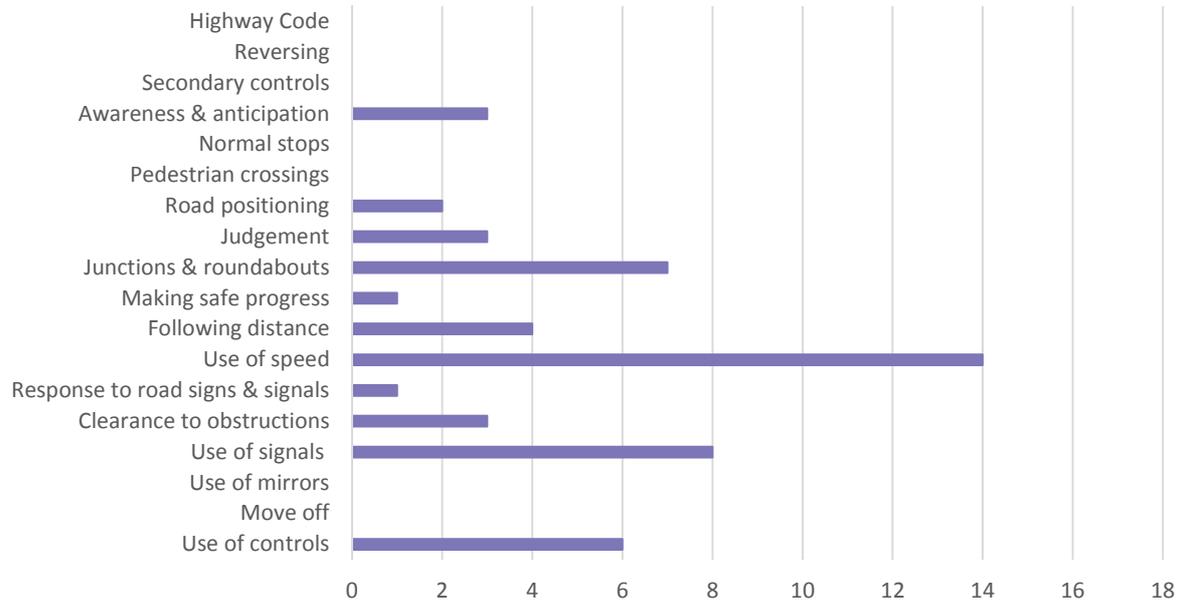
Advisories identified - age range 70-74



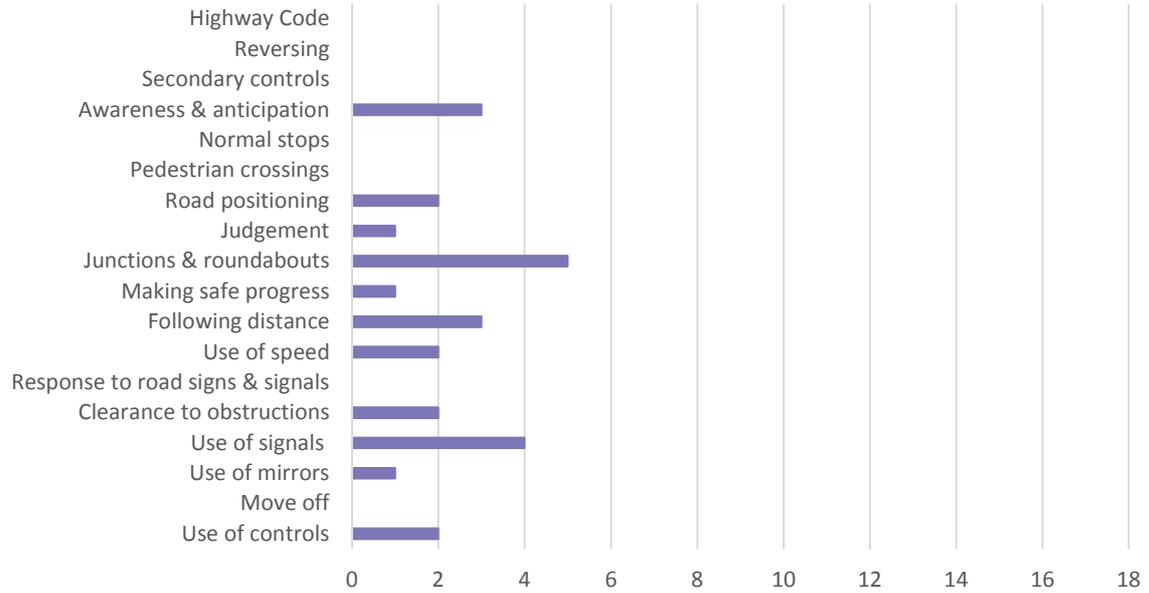
Advisories identified - age range 75-79



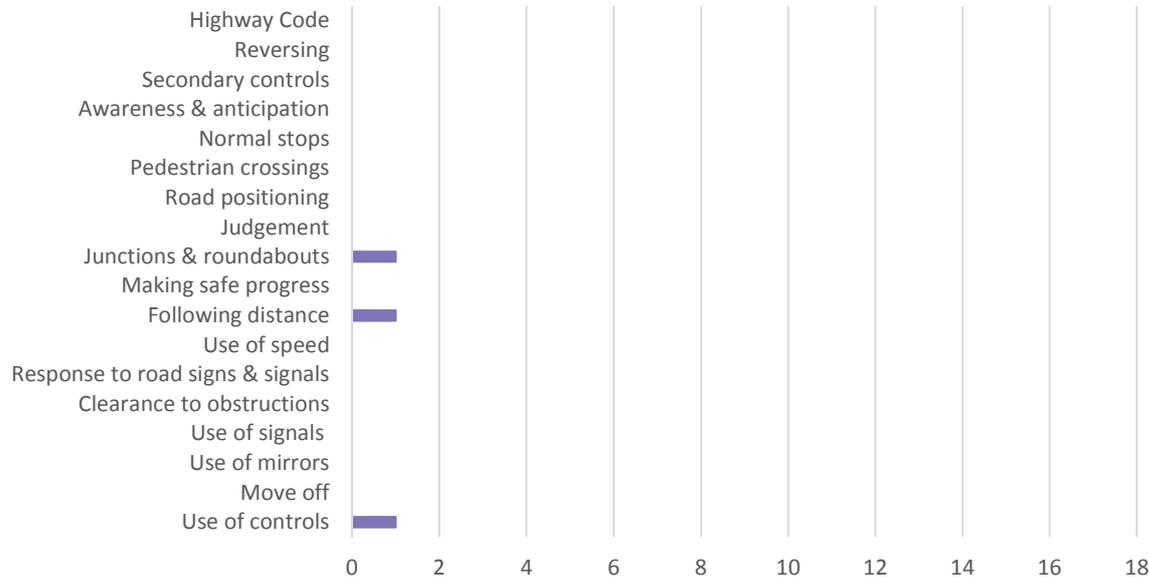
Most common advisory - Age range 80-84

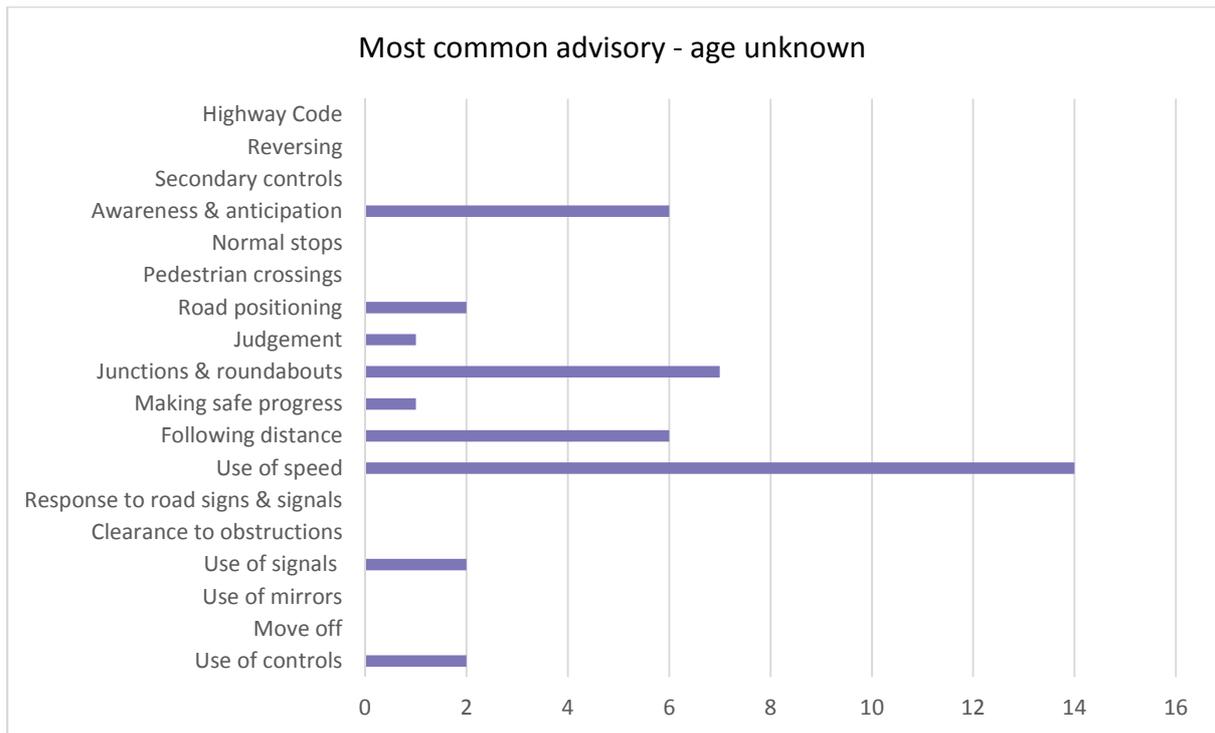


Advisories identified - age range 85-89



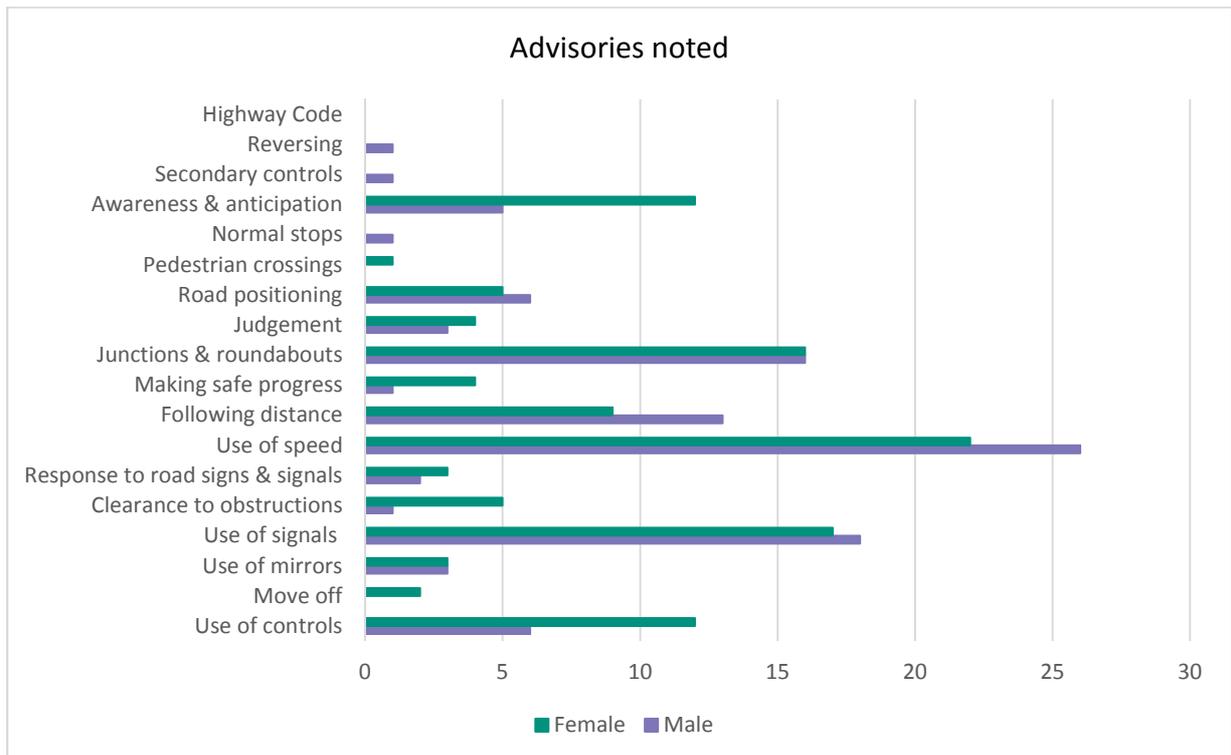
Advisories identified - age range 90-94





Of the 78 drivers who took part in the scheme, where the gender was identifiable from the assessment form, 40 were female and 38 were male. The number of advisories noted were fairly evenly split between genders with female drivers receiving 115 advisories and male drivers receiving 103 advisories in total.

The graph below shows the advisories noted, by category, for both female and male drivers.



Next Steps

Over the last 10 years, from 2007 to 2017, the number of casualties aged 70 and over involved in road traffic collisions in North Wales has seen a 24% reduction, resulting in 156 fewer people injured or killed on the roads. The data from the practical driving assessments undertaken as part of the Older Driver Development Scheme in North Wales in 2017 will be used as baseline data and, along with future results, will be compared with accident and casualty trends to monitor the effect the scheme has had on accident numbers. It is expected that the trend seen over the last 10 years will continue and the number of casualties aged 70 and over involved in road traffic collisions in North Wales will continue to reduce.

The Older Driver Development Scheme has continued into 2018/19 and now includes the introduction of a feedback form for older drivers taking part in the scheme to complete. This will provide valuable feedback from drivers on aspects of the scheme that they found useful and suggestions on how the scheme could be improved. Feedback forms are currently only issued to drivers participating in the scheme in Conwy County but it is hoped the other Local Authorities will begin collecting feedback as well.

Drivers can participate in the Older Driver Development Scheme every 2 years and now that the scheme has been running for a number of years, albeit in a different format prior to 2017, we have started to see some drivers returning to complete the course again because they found it beneficial to take part.