

Transport Research Summary

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Cycle Training in Primary Schools Research

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Transport Scotland and its partners want to ensure that all school children in primary six or seven are offered cycle training on public roads. However, evidence suggests that only around one fifth of primary schools offer on-road cycle training¹. There is limited evidence about why schools are not delivering on-road cycle training.

This research involved developing eleven detailed case studies setting out the experience of planning, delivering and sustaining cycle training in primary schools across Scotland. It focused on exploring the barriers to delivering on-road cycle training in these schools, with a particular focus on how schools have overcome obstacles to introducing sustainable on-road cycle training programmes.

Main Findings

- There was broad support for on-road cycle training and common agreement that it was superior to playground based training – offering a more realistic experience and faster and more effective learning.
- Schools with on-road cycle training programmes were generally content with these, and felt that they were sustainable. The biggest concern for schools relating to on-road training was being able to ensure pupil safety.
- A key component of delivering safe on-road training was having an adequate number of volunteer trainers to ensure a reasonable ratio of adults to children. Identifying volunteers to deliver on-road training was the most significant and common barrier to on-road training.
- Some schools asked staff to volunteer as trainers alongside parents, or involved Road Safety Officers or other local authority staff temporarily. This reduced parent responsibility and built staff expertise in on-road training.
- Other key barriers include identifying a suitable safe site, and resistance to change amongst school staff. Some schools had enhanced volunteer confidence through taking a phased approach to moving from the playground, to a quiet road and on to a busier environment. Signs and fluorescent tabards were also used to alert drivers.
- Some schools in areas of high deprivation identified barriers to introducing any kind of cycle training – with challenges ensuring adequate supply of bicycles, safe storage of equipment and identifying suitable locations.
- Parent councils were positive about and supportive of on-road cycle training, but had limited involvement in planning training at the case study schools.

About this Study

In 2010, Transport Scotland commissioned ODS Consulting to investigate the barriers facing primary schools in delivering on-road cycle training and explore how some schools have overcome these barriers.

Methodology

The research involved telephone interviews with those involved in planning and delivering cycle training programmes at eleven primary schools in Scotland. This included head teachers, teachers, staff and parent volunteers, parent council members, Road Safety Officers and Active Schools Co-ordinators.

The eleven schools were selected to include schools offering different types of cycle training, and a mix of characteristics such as geographical location and level of deprivation.

Cycle Training Programmes

At the time of this research, cycle training for primary six and seven pupils was delivered through the Scottish Cycle Training Scheme, which involved both classroom based and practical training. The practical training was normally delivered through parents, school staff and others who volunteer as trainers, with support and training from Road Safety Officers or Active Schools Co-ordinators².

Six of the case study schools offered this practical training in an on-road environment, two offered off-road training (in the playground), and three did not offer any cycle training at all.

All of the schools were keen to have a cycle training programme, with the exception of one which felt that it would be a challenge to find time in the curriculum.

All of the schools offering cycle training did so with primary six and/or primary seven children. Generally, participants felt this was an appropriate age to deliver on-road cycle training.

Attitudes to On-Road Training

There was common agreement across teachers, support staff and parents that on-road training was superior to playground based training – offering a more realistic experience and faster and more effective learning. Road Safety Officers also felt that on-road training was more effective.

All of the case study schools, whether offering on-road training or not, could see the potential benefits of on-road training. Schools which had recently made the change to offering on-road cycle training all felt that on-road training was ‘far superior’ to the playground based approach.

Parents were generally positive about on-road cycle training, feeling that children enjoyed the training and learned more effectively in an on-road environment.

There were some concerns about on-road training. The key concern was from teachers and support staff at the schools, who had worries about how to ensure pupil safety. Volunteers were very positive about on-road training and the benefits it had for children, but had some concerns about the level of responsibility they were taking on.

Planning and Delivering On-Road Cycle Training

Overall, decisions about the type and level of cycle training offered at the case study schools were made by teachers – generally head teachers and deputy head teachers – working with their Road Safety Officer or Active Schools Co-ordinator. Support and guidance from these road safety professionals was critical in establishing and maintaining on-road cycle programmes.

Parent councils had very limited involvement in decisions about cycle training – despite relatively high levels of interest from parents in this area.

Schools offering on-road cycle training were generally very content with their programme. School staff felt that once programmes were set up, they were relatively easy to sustain. Sustainable on-road training programmes often had strong leadership from the head teacher, dedicated staff volunteers, and an active pool of parent volunteers.

² The Scottish Cycle Training Scheme has since become Bikeability Scotland, managed by Cycling Scotland www.cyclingscotland.org/ourprojects/bikeability-scotland-2/

Barriers to On-Road Training

The biggest concern relating to on-road training was being able to ensure pupil safety.

Identifying enough volunteers to deliver on-road training safely was the most significant and common barrier identified by teachers, support staff and parents. All agreed that generally more volunteers were required to deliver on-road than off-road training, and volunteers required more intensive training.

Volunteering to assist with on-road training is seen as more of a responsibility than assisting with playground based training, due to concerns over pupil safety.

Resistance to change (amongst teachers and support staff) was also a barrier, with some participants seeing no reason to change what they saw as effective off-road cycle training programmes.

There were also some barriers to introducing any type of cycle training. Three schools indicated that some of their pupils would not own or be able to borrow a bike to take part in the training. All three schools were in areas of relatively high deprivation.

Schools with sustainable on-road cycle training programmes had often faced these challenges, but introduced strategies to address these. For example, schools had:

- piloted on-road training with support from Community Wardens as volunteers;
- identified staff to act as volunteers, with some support from parents;
- used a staged approach to move from playground based to on-road training gradually;
- introduced intensive training for regular volunteers;
- put up signs to alert drivers and required children to wear fluorescent tabards; and/ or
- asked children to share bicycles or borrowed bicycles from the local authority.

However, attracting adequate numbers of volunteers often remained the most significant ongoing challenge for sustaining on-road cycle programmes.

Where schools were able to dedicate staff time to volunteering, this appeared to provide more sustainability – with a skilled team able to develop expertise and support parent volunteers as required. Ongoing support, training and guidance from Road Safety Officers and Active Schools Co-ordinators was also essential.

Conclusions

Prior to this research being undertaken, there was limited evidence around barriers to on-road cycle training for primary school pupils in Scotland. This research has provided rich information about the experience of considering, planning, delivering and sustaining on-road cycle training at eleven schools in Scotland.

This research has highlighted that there are barriers to on-road training in Scotland. The biggest barrier relates to attracting volunteers to deliver the training. On-road training is seen as requiring more volunteer resources than off-road training, to ensure a suitable ratio of adults to children. Volunteering as an on-road trainer is also seen as a significant responsibility.

The research also demonstrates that many schools have successfully overcome barriers to run effective and sustainable on-road cycle training programmes. On-road cycle training has been most sustainable where teachers and support staff are supportive of cycle training; where parents are supportive and keen to volunteer; and where support is available from the Road Safety Officer or Active Schools Co-ordinator.

As this research has focused on a small sample of eleven schools, it does not provide wider evidence about the extent and nature of on-road cycle training programmes across Scotland. However, it does demonstrate that a number of the case study schools have moved to on-road cycle training programmes in recent years, and that local road safety professionals have been key to supporting and sustaining this shift.

Overall, this research highlights that there is broad common agreement among parents, teachers, volunteers and road safety professionals that on-road cycle training is considerably more effective and more enjoyable for children than off-road cycle training.

