‘No Excuse’ Campaign
Focus Group Report
November 2011

Focus Groups were held 11, 12 October 2011

Prepared by The Market Research Group
Bournemouth University
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Introduction

The Market Research Group

The Market Research Group (MRG) is an independent market research agency based within Bournemouth University. We are a full service agency, with our trained staff giving us the ability to conduct desk research, quantitative and qualitative projects. We specialise in providing market research and intelligence services to public sector organisations, and organisations within the academic, tourism and heritage sectors. We work in partnership with our clients and focus on adding value at every stage of the research process together with a cost effective and flexible service. MRG adheres to the Market Research Society’s (MRS) code of conduct and the Data Protection Act 1998, which ensures that both our clients and respondents are treated fairly.

Recruitment

The Dorset Citizens’ Panel was used as the sample base for recruiting two focus groups that were to be held in Dorchester (West Dorset) and Wimborne (East Dorset). A random telephone methodology was used to recruit panel members to the focus groups. The recruitment criteria stipulated was that panel members were current drivers, had not had a driving offence issued in Dorset over the last 18 months and that the focus groups had a mixture of participants from all age groups.

Panel members were selected at random and were asked if they would like to attend a road safety discussion group. They would receive a £20 incentive voucher of their choice for attending one of the groups. Twelve participants were recruited for each group with the aim of having at least eight participants at each of the groups. Both the Dorchester and Wimborne focus group had eleven participants who attended the group on the night.

Panel members were purposely not provided with information about the themes of the groups. In their confirmation letters they were simply told that they were attending a focus group on Road Safety and the location and time details. The reason for this being that one of the aims of the group was to find out if participants knew about the ‘No Excuse’ campaign without prior information.

Aims of the focus group

The overall aims of the project were to explore and answer the following questions:

- Do members of the public believe there is more traffic enforcement on Dorset’s roads since the ‘No Excuse’ campaign started?
- Do they believe the likelihood of being caught is greater since the ‘No Excuse’ campaign started?
- Have drivers altered their driving behaviour as a result of a greater risk of being caught?
- To see what participants thought of the publicity material surrounding the campaign, where they had seen it previously and whether they thought it was effective.
Demographics

As mentioned previously, eleven participants attended both the Dorchester and Wimborne focus groups. The demographics of the participants are shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age group</td>
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<td>25 - 44</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>45 - 64</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 - 74</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>District Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christchurch</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>East Dorset</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dorset</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purbeck</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Dorset</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weymouth and Portland</td>
<td>4</td>
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Focus group plan

The first section of the focus group concentrated on asking participants if their driving behaviour had changed in the last year and a half, and whether they had noticed more traffic enforcement in Dorset. Participants were purposely not given any information about the ‘no excuse’ campaign as we wanted to find out if anyone mentioned it before being prompted. ‘Ask the audience’ handset devices were used to ask participants a series of questions, their answers to these led to further discussion. The second section of the focus group concentrated on promotional material used for the ‘No Excuse’ campaign. Participants were asked whether they had seen the material before and for their views regarding the effectiveness of the different promotional material used.
What do you think makes a safe driver?

As a warm up exercise into the topic of road safety, participants were asked what they thought made a safe driver. The responses received are given below:

- “An alert driver”
- “Somebody who anticipates what’s happening ahead of them”
- “Someone who’s not distracted by the radio or their mobile phone, talking to the person next to them etc”
- “Somebody who’s aware of speed limits”
- “Obeying the rules generally”
- “Patience – I think is lacking these days”
- “Not being complacent”
- “Watch the other driver”
- “Anticipation”
- “I think a safe driver is someone who’s aware of the road conditions at all times including the weather and people in front of them”
- “Consideration for others”
- “Stick to the speed limits”
- “And stick to the speed limit and assume the speed limit is correct don’t drive under it”
- “Making sure you’re in a good condition before you get in the car”
- “Awareness of self”
- “Awareness of really what is happening around you, not only on the road but off the road as well.”
- “I think concentration as well, I have a problem with my husband’s concentration, he panics me a little bit”
- “Awareness of the rules of the road as well”
How safe would you rate your own driving?

Using their handset to vote, participants were asked how safe they felt their own driving was. Across the two focus groups 10 out of 22 answered that their driving was ‘very safe’ and the remaining 12 rated their driving as ‘fairly safe’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety rating of own driving</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very safe</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly safe</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither safe nor unsafe</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly unsafe</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very unsafe</td>
<td>0</td>
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Traffic enforcement in Dorset

Do you think traffic enforcement measures in Dorset have increased, decreased or stayed the same?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of traffic enforcement</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decreased</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stayed the same</td>
<td>6</td>
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Participants were asked whether they felt traffic enforcement in Dorset had increased, decreased or remained the same since 2010. Using the handsets, 10 participants (out of the total of 22) answered that they felt traffic enforcement had increased, 6 thought that it had decreased and a further 6 felt that it had stayed the same.

**Enforcement has increased**

Those who had answered that they felt enforcement had increased were asked why they thought this might be the case. Road signs were mentioned:

“…I think there are a lot more signs that look like things are being enforced, like speed restrictions and the campaigns that have been running…” (Wimborne)

“…the road signs, I see a lot of those signs when I drive so…” (Dorchester)

“There have been more police cars, where I live in Gillingham there’s been a spate of people being stopped for speeding.” (Dorchester)

“The SID thing as well” (Dorchester)

Although an increase in signs was mentioned some felt that signage alone did not necessarily indicate increased enforcement:

“…I see the ‘No Excuse’ signs but that’s not really enforcement is it?…” (Wimborne)

“…I drive past one of those ‘No Excuse’ signs regularly and I’ve never seen anybody, I thought well ‘how do they enforce it’, I’ve just never seen anybody…” (Wimborne)

“…how do you know, unless you see the police stopping people and arguing there’s no way of telling is there?…” (Dorchester)

“It depends what you mean by enforcement doesn’t it? Because there’s warnings, not the cameras the things that record the speed you’re going at, there are a lot more of them around and I see the ‘no excuse’ signs but that’s not really enforcement is it?” (Wimborne)

Other forms of publicity had also been noted:

“…I think there’s been a lot of publicity about the No Excuses campaign as well” (Dorchester)

“I was about to say that one because of reading the Bournemouth Echo, not because of my own personal experience. They very frequently feature the ‘No Excuses’ campaign. I’ve never seen anybody stopped or been near that happening so I thought my own experience must therefore be that it’s stayed the same but the Echo feature it two or three times a month.” (Wimborne)

Some of the participants, who stated that they thought enforcement had increased, said they responded that way because of word of mouth:

“I think people tell you about it don’t they, your friends and the people that you know locally tell you. We had a period of time when there were two or three unmarked
police cars in Gillingham so that go to be known locally, you know, that our area was being targeted.” (Dorchester)

Enforcement has decreased

Those who answered that enforcement had decreased felt that there were fewer deterrents against bad driving:

“…I don’t think people feel a deterrent; I don’t think a deterrent is there anymore, it’s much less than it was…” (Dorchester)

“…I think the deterrent has gone down more and more…” (Dorchester)

The perceived lack of police presence and activity was indicated as the main reason for this:

“…when I drive late at night there’s fewer police about than there was when I first moved down here…” (Dorchester)

“…I’m also aware that there are more cameras going out of operation perhaps.” (Wimborne)

“…most of the police I think cruise around in the vans and their cars are going somewhere, they’re not interested in the traffic that’s around. The days of the old copper on his bicycle driving around an area enforcing the law, making sure the law is obeyed have gone…” (Dorchester)

“…of course the number of vehicles on the road has increased very significantly over the years but the police haven’t of course, that’s another face to it I think…” (Dorchester)

“There ought to be a consideration by the police that – they haven’t got the people to do it I know – but in an ideal world they ought to be about enforcing the traffic rules and regulations.” (Dorchester)

Some participants also mentioned an increase in poor driving behaviour in relation to decreased enforcement:

“…there’s an increase in small things like people using their mobile phones…” (Dorchester)

“…everybody is in such a hurry these days, this is the trouble…” (Dorchester)

“…I find a lot when I’ve driven at the speed limit, the number of times I’ve had someone right up my rear is just horrendous and it makes me very nervous on these windy roads. It happens all the time.” (Dorchester)

“…it’s about poor overtaking when it’s unsafe to do so, it is about people coming up right behind you when you’re doing the same speed…they’re crowding you out…I’ve seen no enforcement action being taken on those kinds of things whatsoever you know…” (Dorchester)
Since 2010 do you think the number of people killed or seriously injured on Dorset’s roads has increased, decreased or stayed the same?

Most people felt that the number of KSIs had probably remained the same in the last year (9 out of 22) or were unsure (7 out of 22). Of those remaining, more people felt that accidents had decreased (4) than increased (2).

Since 2010 do you think the likelihood of you being caught for a driving offence in Dorset has increased, decreased or stayed the same?

Participants were asked to vote on whether there was an increased likelihood of getting caught for a driving offence themselves and then whether they felt other drivers were more likely to be caught. The responses were as follows:
Since 2010 do you think the likelihood of other drivers being caught for a driving offence in Dorset has increased, decreased or stayed the same?

A lack of visible police presence and the sense that police resources are dwindling were cited as reasons why some participants felt there had been a decrease in the possibility of being caught:

“Resources in general, you can’t see things being increased much more.” (Wimborne)

“It’s all being cut back now isn’t it, cameras are being cut back so naturally you think the likelihood is now decreasing of being caught.” (Wimborne)

“You certainly don’t see as many of the vans out as you used to” (Dorchester)

“Have they not turned off all the static cameras as well?” (Dorchester)

Participants in both groups mentioned that you are more likely to get caught for some driving offences rather than others, mainly due to new technologies available.

“If you think about driving offences as a whole, things like no insurance, no tax, no MOT, your likelihood of being caught for those offences has gone through the roof because you’ve now got statutory off road notification for insurance as well as for tax and you’ve got things like automatic number plate recognition all across the place. You’ve got those in vehicles as well so the odds of being caught for no insurance, no tax, no MOT are almost 100% over a period of time, so looking at offences as a whole, those were a lot higher.” (Dorchester)

“It’s almost as if there’s a greater reliance on technology for some offences like no insurance because effectively police can’t drive past a queue of traffic, in our system they check every single number plate against an insurance database but won’t check if you’re on a mobile phone so you can be much more complacent. Some offences – it’s almost the easy offences you’ll be caught and the others you won’t be.” (Dorchester)
“Well I think looking at the cameras inside the police cars these days they can look at your car and they can see right away if you’ve got your tax, insurance etc and they can have you up just like that and I like that idea because there are too many people going around who do get away with it and if somebody has an accident you try and prosecute them and it’ll take years and years” (Wimborne)

Increase of technology was given by one participant who had responded saying the likelihood of being caught had decreased:

“Also, don’t you think with technology though, look at the Tom Tom has the camera detection system so it knows exactly where it is, I’ve got a Radar in mine that warns me fifteen seconds before the next camera comes so the technology is working against you getting caught now as well and for you not getting caught, so technology is working both ways.” (Wimborne)

One participant said that the fine for a speeding offence was a deterrent,

“ And also, the £60 fine, nobody wants to pay £60 so they can go to this extra driving course which I’ve never attended of course but that said I don’t like the idea of parting with £60.” (Wimborne)

Since 2010 has your driving behaviour changed?

Most participants felt that their driving behaviour had not changed in the past year (12 people out of 22), 8 people said their driving had changed. The main reason cited for a change in driving behaviour was driving less frequently:

“…I’m older and I drive less…” (Wimborne)

“I do less miles than I used to and I’m not so pressurised to get places so I don’t feel the need to be so fast…” (Dorchester)

“…my miles have decreased…but I don’t think I’m as good a driver because I don’t get practice…” (Dorchester)

“I used to drive a lot for work, all over the country and I don’t now so I haven’t got the same number of time pressures on me so it’s really nice now.” (Wimborne)

The cost of fuel was a reason given by one participant to explain why his driving behaviour had changed.

“Well mainly because I don’t want to use so much petrol so I don’t drive as fast on motorways as I used to” (Wimborne)

Can you recall any road safety campaigns?

When asked which campaigns they could recall many participants referred to the ‘No Excuse’ campaign with road signs in particular mentioned:

“The road signs are quite good aren’t they?” (Dorchester)
Other large National campaigns were also recalled:

“...I was thinking of ‘clunk click...” (Wimborne)

“The drink drive campaigns over Christmas and New Year.” (Wimborne)

“The think campaign – think bike...” (Wimborne)

‘No excuse’ campaign

It was at this point in the focus group the ‘No Excuse’ campaign was mentioned by the facilitators for the first time. However as stated before, in both discussion groups, participants had already mentioned the campaign and the signs. The facilitator held up a ‘No Excuse’ road sign and asked participants whether they had seen it before.

Have you seen the ‘No Excuse’ sign before?

All but one of the participants had seen the ‘No Excuse’ sign before, and most said they had seen it on the roadside. A few people had mentioned seeing it at a bus stop. Participants were asked what they thought the sign meant when they saw it – what they felt was included in the ‘No Excuse’ message. A few expressed an initial confusion regarding the purpose of the signs:

“...to start with I hadn’t a clue...” (Wimborne)

“...It was ages before I clicked what it was about...” (Wimborne)

“...I've wondered ‘what do they do there?’” (Wimborne)

Most participants felt that the campaign was mainly concerned with speed:

“I think it's a lot to do with speed isn’t it?” (Dorchester)

“I always thought it was speed, I only thought it was speed actually” (Dorchester)

“...I thought it was to stop people driving fast really...” (Dorchester)

A couple of people indicated that an association with speed may be due to ‘No Excuse’ signs being placed next to other speed limit enforcement measures:

“The ones I see are usually near enforcement cameras or near the ones that flash up the speed limit so they’re normally associated by their closeness...” (Dorchester)

A few people had understood that the campaign was intended to cover other driving offences:

“I thought it was really straightforward, if you’re caught there’s no excuse, you can’t talk your way out of it” (Wimborne)

“I would associate it with any offence, you know using a mobile phone and not having a seatbelt on...not just particularly speeding.” (Dorchester)
“...I might be being influenced by what I read in the Echo every night...but mobile phones and seatbelts too…” (Wimborne)

Some participants felt that a stronger association between the signs and the offences they were intended to discourage would provide a clearer message:

“I think it should be obvious what the sign is referring to...if it’s next to a 30 sign then it’s about speed, if it’s a ‘no overtaking’ sign then it’s about not overtaking inappropriately” (Dorchester)

“Where it’s on the roadside I wish it would actually – they’re often nowhere near a speed sign - we have so many drivers going through the county who are not local drivers, I wish very simply just to put on the notice what the current speed is, just a small round 30 or something I think would be so much better.” (Dorchester)

“Without adverts on the TV or seeing anything else, if I’d just seen it on the roadside, I’d make no other association other than it’s a speed thing.” (Dorchester)

One participant felt that the fact that the ‘boundaries’ of the campaign were difficult to understand ‘diluted’ the message, making the campaign less effective.

Would seeing the ‘No Excuse’ sign on the road affect your driving behaviour?

Some participants reported that seeing the signs had affected their driving behaviour:

“I usually slow down” (Wimborne)

“I think it affects me because I’d be ashamed if I got caught so…” (Dorchester)

“It affects my behaviour so I imagine there are other drivers like me” (Dorchester)

“I’ve always taken the view when I’ve seen them well they’ve obviously got them in the village, is it because there’s someone in the village enforcing it so I best slow down.” (Dorchester)

Not everybody felt that seeing a sign would change their behaviour or that it would affect the driving of other road users:

“Not because of the sign no, but then to be honest I don’t speed through built up areas so in that sense it wouldn’t affect me anyway.” (Wimborne)

“..I’ve only ever seen one sign…and I’ve only ever seen it in one place…there are never any police about, there’s never anyone looking to enforce it. I’m still constantly frustrated with drivers who…speed up, come to a speed camera, put their foot on the brakes and then speed up again. None of this campaign is having any effect on that.” (Wimborne)

“...it’s almost tokenism, it’s being seen to be doing something…” (Dorchester)
Road safety campaigns

There was some discussion in both groups regarding the effectiveness of road safety campaigns and other preventative measures. Participants seemed to feel that although they and other considerate drivers like themselves might be affected by SID cameras, campaigns and other forms of prevention, that drivers who were more likely to commit offences could not be reached so easily:

“I think they work for people who are minded that way, it might deter them but other people I think it has absolutely no effect.” (Dorchester)

“Really we’re talking about careful drivers in the main…but is that what this campaign is about, to catch the likes of us, or is it really trying to catch the real people who do break the law and is it having an effect on them and the probable answer to that is no…” (Wimborne)

“…the speed signs that tell you your speed…they don’t do anything…some people think it’s a joke…If I go through it yes I think ‘that’s a bit fast’ or whatever I’ll take notice of it but other people don’t, they go straight through and think it’s funny…” (Dorchester)

“Surely part of it is not about catching people speeding though, it’s about changing the behaviour of society, so if they’re not speeding, you don’t want people to speed and then catch them, I mean this is all about a proactive thing encouraging even small changes in behaviour so you might be driving at 35 in a 30 mile an hour area and you might think ‘well it’s only 35, I’m not really speeding’, but of course you are so if it’s near a school or near a corner you’re a danger. I think a lot of us have said that it does make us aware, particularly if it’s in an area where you’re going from 30 to 60 or 50 to 30 adjusting that focus, so I think it probably is having some impact both with these signs and with the monitors that tell you how fast you’re going rather than speed cameras, so I think it is having some impact but probably not for some people who perpetually drive at very high speeds and take no notice.” (Wimborne)

“All they see is a challenge you know, there’s a feeling of immunity…people who aren’t inclined to use the mobile phone while driving…yeah they’re useful reminders but actually for people who aren’t inclined to change, it’s not particularly effective…” (Dorchester)

The implication seemed to be that harder enforcements were required to really have an impact on drivers who persist in bad behaviour:

“…the actual effectiveness of enforcements, you don’t see the impact of it…sometimes it’s almost as if they’re going through the motions, it’s the ‘let’s be seen to be doing something’…Dorset all seems to be about smoke and mirrors frankly, it’s more of a PR exercise than actual proper enforcement.” (Dorchester)

‘Proper’ enforcement for many participants seemed to come in the form of the threat, or experience of being caught by the police:

“…the points that come through the post now and a £60 fine, it’s like ‘oh god’ huff and puff and you swear and you just carry on but when I got stopped…someone spoke to me, that had a great deal more effect.” (Wimborne)
“…It's the same old story about the copper on the beat isn't it? Without policemen around on the beat it's the same old thing.” (Wimborne)

“…if there is a marked police car, it makes you do whatever is correct…” (Dorchester)

“…if you see lots more marked cars it alters people’s behaviour because you think psychologically that the chance of being caught is a lot higher, whereas if they're all unmarked you don't.” (Dorchester)

There was some feeling that road safety campaigns were as much about preventing bad driving through awareness and education as opposed to simply providing a deterrent by catching people out:

“…part of it is not about catching people speeding though, it’s about changing the behaviour of society…I mean this is all about a proactive thing encouraging even small changes in behaviour…” (Wimborne)

“…there’s nothing that really alters the psyche in the same way as I don’t know drink driving campaigns in the 60s and 70s that changed people’s behaviour…” (Dorchester)

“…for me, yes, enforcement is important but it’s much more about changing behaviour – like your 40 to 30, at 40 you’re killed at 30 you’re not.” (Dorchester)

The idea that safety campaigns were less effective if seen to be a short term measure was discussed:

“…if you think of the ‘No Smoking’ campaigns and the ‘Clunk Click’, it's going to take years…” (Dorchester)

“…they had a campaign in Dorchester very recently where they saturated the area and they caught numerous speeders…the trouble is that…it says they do it for money…but that's something that ought to be done all the time…to enforce the rules and regulations of the road…” (Dorchester)

“…there’s a deterrent when the campaign’s on but of course that’s well publicised, everybody knows about it, but as soon as it’s finished the threat has gone…” (Dorchester)

**Driver training courses**

Driver training courses as penalties were discussed but again it was felt that these schemes may work for those who make odd mistakes but not for recalcitrant offenders:

“It’s probably going to work for those people who’re just a bit over the limit, 8 miles or whatever it was over the limit but it’s the people who are driving aggressively and tail gating and pushing to get around, it’s going to have no effect.” (Dorchester)

Some participants were critical of the schemes more generally:
“…I really resent…the divergent schemes they’ve got in Dorset…instead of bringing them to court for driving without due care or speeding the police will say ‘go on one of our pet re-training schemes which we make money out of’ rather than be prosecuted and get penalty points.” (Dorchester)

“……you can be involved in a road traffic accident…and the person who’s caused the accident against you doesn’t get prosecuted because Dorset Police make money out of the fact that they’re sent on all these training courses.” (Dorchester)

“…there’s a big issue with that in my mind, it’s how effective that is as a deterrent.” (Dorchester)

“It looks like a soft option doesn’t it, OK go and have a bit of retraining, get back in your car, drive off down the road and forget the whole lot.” (Dorchester)

On the other hand, some participants could see that drivers might benefit from further training:

“…how many times do people do any further driver training, from the point that they pass the test…” (Dorchester)

“…if even a third of the people who went on one of those courses, if they changed their behaviour that would be a result.” (Dorchester)

“I know two people who’ve done that course and they said it really changed them.” (Wimborne)

**Speed limit signs**

There was general agreement among participants in both groups that there were insufficient speed limit signs on stretches of road in the county where the limit changed frequently:

“You can go for miles without seeing a sign” (Dorchester)

“It’s usually when they’ve stopped and you think ‘what was the speed limit?’” (Dorchester)

“…sometimes you think you’re in a 30 and you’re doing 30 but they’ve changed it and it’s a 20 but they didn’t tell you.” (Wimborne)

“I think there are some places where the way they set them is almost bound to catch you” (Wimborne)

“…and sometimes even the repeated signs have got lost in the hedges…”

“…you can’t see them, especially at night…” (Dorchester)

**Mobile phones**

There was a lot of discussion in both groups regarding the use of mobile phones when driving:
“Every time I drive literally you see somebody using a mobile phone. You know, so the actual effectiveness of enforcements you don’t see the impact of it. I think sometimes it’s almost as if they’re going through the motions, it’s the ‘lets be seen to be doing something’” (Dorchester)

“You talked about telephones and really they are the bane of everybody’s life, so many drivers are using them when they shouldn’t but how do you catch them because the police cars are running that way or are stationery and the cars are running that way, by the time you get there ‘I saw you on the phone’ – the van drivers and all sorts, it’s terrible, it shouldn’t be allowed.” (Wimborne)

Participants also touched on the difficulty of preventing mobile phone use and responding effectively to other forms of inconsiderate and dangerous driving:

“…telephones…really…are the bane of everybody’s life, so many drivers are using them when they shouldn’t but how do you catch them?” (Wimborne)

“…speed is an easy target. Catching someone tail gating is not an easy target when you’re parked up on the side of the roadway…” (Dorchester)

“…I can’t think of any incidence of anyone I know who’s ever been stopped for anything other than speed…” (Dorchester)

Newspaper promotion

Participants were asked whether they had seen a number of the driver’s excuses publicised in newspapers. Only a couple of those attending had seen the snippets. Some participants did not feel that the quotes acted as a useful promotional tool for the campaign due to their humorous nature:

“It just seems like a bit of a joke.” (Wimborne)

“I was slightly shocked by the second one but on the whole it just seems like they make light out of it really.” (Wimborne)

“I think you would probably laugh but then not take the message from it.” (Wimborne)

“I think most people reading those would see those as silly and extreme excuses so they wouldn’t relate them to themselves and therefore their behaviour wouldn’t change.” (Wimborne)

“These sorts of things just reinforce the view that road safety is a bit of a laugh, it’s comical you know, stand up jokes sort of thing.” (Dorchester)

“…it can also exacerbate that it’s a bit of a game between the police who enforce it you know and the motorist who’s trying to avoid being caught…” (Dorchester)
One participant said that the fatal accident stories reported in the local papers have a bigger impact on driving behaviour than reading about excuses people give after being caught for a driving offence:

“The biggest thing that has an impact on me is the fatal accident reports, you know you see as you drive down the road the Echo headline, you know, ‘Mother of two killed on bypass’ or whatever it says, you know, that’s the biggest impact for me. Yes these are amusing but you know…” (Dorchester)

“A fatal accident report you’d read and you’d think yeah you know, those are the salutary reminders that when I’m driving down the road, ‘no I won’t overtake that car I don’t mind being 5 minutes late’.” (Dorchester)

“The trouble is with that… there’s no follow up is there, you read that and as bad as it is, as shocking as it is, you never get to know who’s fault it was, there’s no road report afterwards saying that A was driving much faster than he should have been” (Dorchester)

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**Posters and road signs**

At this point of the focus group, participants were given a pack of post it notes and were asked to look at posters used to promote the ‘No Excuse’ campaign and potential poster designs to promote the campaign. For posters that were already being used by the campaign, participants were asked if they had seen it, where they had seen it, how effective they thought the sign was and whether there were any particular places the sign should be displayed. Due to timings not all participants were able to comment on all the posters. Below is a summary of the comments.

**Caught? No excuse, Caught yet? No excuse, Caught again? No excuse**

None of the participants had seen these adverts in the local press and there were some comments about there being too much text on the posters and that the text wasn’t in Plain English.

**I'm …. We haven't met yet**

Approximately half of participants who had commented on these posters had seen them before on the bus or bus stop. Many also commented that they thought these were effective.

**No excuse – Cracking down on bad and careless driving**

The majority of people hadn’t seen these posters. No one had seen the version of the poster with the picture of the person putting the CD in the car. A few people had seen the poster of someone texting on a bus / or at a bus stop. These were seen as less effective than the ‘we haven’t met yet’ posters.

**R U Txting? Driving using phone?, Seatbelt are you wearing yours?, Speed check area, Drink/drive, check ahead.**

The new style of poster had positive reviews from most participants especially the “RU Txting?” and the “Seatbelt are you wearing yours” signs. There were mixed reviews about the “driver using phone” sign with some participants saying it was effective and others
disagreeing. Participants thought the “Speed check area” sign was effective but thought it could be improved by including the speed limit on the sign. A few participants commented on the “drink/drive, check ahead” sign. One suggested removing the “ahead”, another suggested locating the signs near pubs. A few were confused by the message the sign was trying to communicate.

This feedback suggests the campaign should continue to use the “I’m….we haven’t met yet” posters and should roll out the new style of posters. This would also help to clarify the offences the ‘No Excuse’ campaign covers, a point which had confused some participants.

Radio Adverts

Have you heard these radio adverts before?

Participants were asked if they’d heard any of the 3 sets of adverts and responded as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio Adverts 1 (actors)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Adverts 2 (real people)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Adverts 3 (‘we haven’t met…’)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Technical fault in group 1 meant we could not gain responses regarding the first set of adverts for this group

As can be seen from the table above, the majority of respondents had not heard any of the radio advertisements previously. In both groups participants said that this was because they did not listen to local commercial radio.

Which of the three types of advert did you find most effective?

When asked which advert they found most effective 18 people out of 21 responded that the third set of adverts using real emergency services and medical personnel to describe accidents (“I’m..., we haven’t met yet, let’s keep it that way”) were most effective. When asked how the third set of adverts made them feel, participants made the following responses:

“It makes you feel uncomfortable.” (Dorchester)

“…the third one, because it makes you feel uncomfortable, you know if you get caught you get caught, if you’re caught for speeding then yeah you hold your hands up but that makes you feel uncomfortable, if it makes you think again then that’s why it’s going to work.” (Dorchester)

“…by far and away the third ones were the most sobering…it actually made you think about it whereas the other two it didn’t really.” (Wimborne)

“…three certainly from my point of view was more chilling and I think it was more serious.” (Wimborne)
When asked if they found the third set of adverts a bit too disturbing the general response in one group was that they were not disturbing enough. One participant in the second group felt that the negativity of the adverts was unhelpful:

“…they’re negative reinforcement so I think human beings will naturally feel defensive if they’re constantly thrashed with something that’s negative. So I think whilst I think they’re quiet powerful, I think they’re missing a trick in that most people respond to positive reinforcement you know ‘be vigilant’ those sorts of things…I don’t think these will change behaviours, I think they’ll just heighten awareness temporarily” (Wimborne)

A couple of participants felt that the adverts may distract or make them want to turn the radio off:

“…you might listen to it and you might pay attention the first time but I think a third time it would just be too much and I would turn the radio down or turn it off and not listen to it again. I think again, because it’s really quite extreme examples I’m not sure how much behaviour it would change, it’s really scare tactics…” (Wimborne)

“…it’s people telling me to do what I’m doing and I don’t like that. On the other side, I think if I hadn’t heard these before they would cause me to be distracted which is surely counter productive…” (Wimborne)

**DVD**

There was agreement among most participants that the DVD advert was slightly less hard hitting than the audio version of the same story:

“The radio advert is much more effective, because you’ve got a picture in your mind.” (Dorchester)

“I thought the radio version, perhaps it’s just the imagination but I felt that the radio had higher production values than the video.” (Wimborne)

“…because of the impact it has in your mind, your own imagination, the radio is much more effective.” (Wimborne)

Other participants felt that the impact of the DVD was not sufficiently strong:

“It wasn’t a very strong message I don’t feel. I thought the message was pretty weak, it didn’t achieve what they were trying to do…” (Wimborne)

“…there’s so many of these shows on television now…that, to be honest, is nothing compared to what’s out there on television…people have become desensitized to it all.” (Wimborne)

“That’s really something or nothing, I get the point but I don’t know…You didn’t see very much of the car or the actual impact where it happened. Not that you’d be wanting to see bodies or anything but you didn’t see anything very much other than the policeman.” (Wimborne)
Participants were asked where and how the DVD could be used to promote road safety. They gave the following responses:

“Businesses and colleges…they could put it on their internal internet system.”
(Dorchester)

“…the driving schools.”
(Dorchester)

“…maybe in the cinema with trailers.”
(Dorchester)

“You could use just the audio in cinemas as well, which might reduce the costs…”
(Dorchester)

One participant felt that the DVD, if sent to schools, would be better off played as part of a talk given by a policeman:

“…thinking back to school, I think there’s a real value in the policeman being there or whoever, the emergency services being there, because you always remember that from school don’t you?”
(Wimborne)

Other Comments and Themes

Participants in the group based at the Allendale Centre in Wimborne felt that the campaign needed to be more visible:

“They should advertise it more.”
(Wimborne)

“We should hear about it more, like television or something, I haven’t heard a lot about it.”
(Wimborne)

“I think it needs to be much more visible…I haven’t seen any police cars with ‘No Excuse’ in their windows.”
(Wimborne)

It was felt that adverts played on commercial radio would not reach broad sections of the community:

“I think it’s quite difficult getting to the audience that you want…a lot of people who you may want to be targeted for the campaign aren’t necessarily the people who like you say might listen to commercial radio.”
(Wimborne)

There was some discussion in both groups about the most effective means by which to change behaviour and reach people with road safety messages:

“You could tie up [road signs] with the prosecution statistics for that location, so when you come into Dorchester ‘No Excuse – 300 prosecutions last year’ or something like that.”
(Dorchester)

“There was a campaign a few years ago where on a particular stretch of road it would say ‘there have been’ so many fatalities…I found that for me that was very hard hitting, it made me stop and think about what I was doing on that stretch of road.”
(Dorchester)
“When you go along Dorset roads and you see...flowers at the side of the road...it's the most effective way of persuading you to drive sensibly because it reminds you somebody's been killed on that stretch.” (Dorchester)

“I think some of the new signs you've got coming out are good. I have seen the signs but I've only seen them in two places...I think to have them more widely spread because obviously you think a lot of people don't look at papers, a lot of people don't listen to commercial radio but obviously everybody who's driving is going to see it if it's on the road.” (Wimborne)

In the Wimborne group it was suggested by some participants that because of the lack of people who listen to commercial radio it would be more effective for Dorset to contribute to a national campaign on road safety linking up with the BBC,

“There seem to be a lot of people here who don’t listen to commercial radio and I don’t, which is obviously one of the audiences for this so I think it’s quite difficult to judge it I don’t know because personally I think the point about TV, I like the fact that the national campaigns appear on...but I think there should be lots more public information stuff on the BBC and stuff like that but we don't seem to have so much of it as we used to, thinking back to my childhood. I think that’s a much better place to have stuff like this because people do watch TV so I don’t think the commercial radio works very well. Also papers, I don’t know if a lot of people read papers anymore and that kind of thing so I think that...I think this has been in the local free papers as well hasn’t it.” (Wimborne)

In the Dorchester group there was a strong message that for the campaign to reduce the number of people offending it would have to make sure that those caught were prosecuted.

“I do think prosecution is the key, making them stick so many people seem to you know ‘I’ve been caught for speeding I’ll just do the same old trick’, go on the internet, find out the local wheeze, they don’t calibrate them, were they really focussed on you and all these things, it’s so easy to get out of speeding tickets it really is. If prosecutions would stick more people would feel the pain.” (Dorchester)

In this group an incident in Chideock was mentioned, which participants felt had a negative effective on the campaign:

“I mean one that made me really cross is the whole issue over Chideock that had that massive publicity because all these drivers got all their fines quashed and yet what they failed to mention, at the end of the day, they were all speeding. Yes, they got off on a technicality because the road was wrongly named but at the end of the day they were all speeding.” (Dorchester)

“That was all quashed because the road name was wrong, this was a campaign led by some guy who’d been caught by a speed camera and he challenged it in the court because it had the wrong name on the ticket so they all got off on a technicality but at the end of the day they were all speeding so it makes a joke of it.” (Dorchester)

In both groups there was support for covert policing,

“I don't think there are many people in the room who have seen or are aware of the unmarked police cars that go around. There are quite a number of them around these days and that’s a very useful thing to see them going around in all sorts of cars
and blue lights flash on the radiator… these police cars are very good and very effective I’m sure they are and when suddenly you can see one in your mirror. I think, personally I would like to see more police but I think that’s something that won’t happen. I’d like to see that in the country overall, but it’s just a situation that we’re in at the present moment until we can afford it.” (Wimborne)

“There seems to be too much warning as well, I can’t remember if it was a European thing or not, about speed enforcement in this country because it’s got to be high visibility and there’s got to be signs telling you that there’s going to be cameras whereas in other countries people do go and hide behind bushes and they catch people out. I think that probably works a lot better when you know that you haven’t got a chance of seeing the enforcement then naturally you’re more cautious and people would be more cautious about speeding anywhere.” (Wimborne)

Some participants mentioned the lack of effectiveness of speed cameras and one participant thought that the only way to stop people speeding was to introduce average speed cameras.

“I travel into Christchurch, there are never police about, there’s never anyone looking to enforce it. I’m still constantly frustrated with drivers who, for instance along the Wessex Way, speed up, come to a speed camera, put their foot on the brakes and then speed up again. None of this campaign is having any effect on that.” (Wimborne)

“My own view, as far as speed is concerned, get rid of these cameras and put average speed cameras on the road, it’s the only way you’re going to stop it, or abandon it altogether.” (Wimborne)
Conclusion

There was a mixed view about whether traffic enforcement had increased or decreased in Dorset over the last 18 months. Some participants, who felt that it had increased, related their answers to the ‘No Excuse’ campaign without being prompted. There was a feeling in both groups that increased enforcement meant more visible policing. Some participants assumed that enforcement had decreased because of reported budget cuts in the public sector. It is possible that publicity surrounding budget cuts within the police force and other public sector agencies has had an impact on how people perceive the budgets available for traffic enforcement.

Almost all of the participants had noticed the ‘No Excuse’ sign. There was a varied response on what the ‘No Excuse’ sign meant and what offences the campaign covered. Some participants were clear that it meant that there was no excuse for any poor driving behaviour but many others had just associated the signs with driving over the speed limit. Some participants said that they thought it was only to do with speed because they only ever saw the ‘No Excuse’ sign near a speed limit sign, on a speed camera, or on the Speed Indicator Devices. More promotion needs to be done to make sure people are aware of what offences are targeted by the ‘No Excuse’ campaign. One participant suggested the speed limit should be displayed on the ‘No Excuse’ sign and another suggested having a picture of a mobile phone crossed out as a possible way of associating particular offences with the campaign. Participants felt the new signs may help to inform drivers of the offences included in the campaign.

During both groups participants mentioned that they thought it was easier to enforce speed restrictions in Dorset rather than prevent drivers using mobile phones whilst driving and most participants felt that there was a high incidence of this offence in Dorset. Further work needs to be done to make sure drivers realise people are being caught and prosecuted for using a mobile phone. One recommendation might be to use road signs to promote the number of people prosecuted in Dorset for using a mobile phone.

The effectiveness of overt and covert enforcement was touched upon throughout the discussions. Some participants supported the promotion and use of unmarked police cars because people never know when they are going to get stopped. Others commented that if the police are visible then that automatically changed driving behaviour.

“If you see lots more marked cars it alters people’s behaviour because you think psychologically that the chance of being caught is a lot higher.” (Dorchester)

This suggests that a mix of covert and overt methods of enforcement might be the best approach rather than choosing one method over the other.

Participants were unsure of the effectiveness of promoting the excuses people give after they’ve been caught in the local newspapers. It was suggested that it would be more effective to promote the numbers of people being prosecuted for the different offences or for people to hear more information about accidents that have occurred. Some participants thought promoting the excuses reinforced the view that road safety was a “bit of a laugh”.

The ‘we haven’t met yet’ signs were seen as the most effective posters by participants and the partnership should continue to use these to promote the campaign. The new types of
road signs were also met with a positive response so the partnership should start to display these around the county. Some participants thought road signs were the best vehicle for promoting the campaign:

“I think road signs, because I think that’s when people are driving and I think that could have immediate effect.”

One participant suggested linking the road signs with prosecution statistics for that location.

Very few participants had heard the radio adverts previously. Once they had listened to all three sets of radio adverts the majority stated that the “we haven’t met yet, lets keep it that way” adverts were the most effective. Further research needs to be conducted into the listening demographics of local commercial radio to consider the effectiveness of these adverts. The latest Dorset Citizens’ Panel survey will help to inform this and results will be available in December 2011.

Feedback from the discussion groups shows that some of the promotional tools associated with the ‘No Excuse’ campaign have had a better effect on people’s driving behaviour than others. If limited funding is available the suggestion from these focus groups would be to concentrate on using road signs to promote and enforce the ‘No Excuse’ campaign.

In the Dorchester group there was a strong feeling that the only way to change people’s driving behaviour was to prosecute and make sure that prosecutions stick.

Further research into the effectiveness of the campaign could be undertaken with people who have been caught for a driving offence, to see if being caught and prosecuted has changed driving behaviour. The partnership could also further examine the effectiveness of the driver awareness course and look at the re-offending rates amongst those who have attended the course against those who have taken the points. This could be done by looking at the statistics and through focus groups. A specific focus group with 18 – 24 year olds about certain types of promotion could be undertaken. Participants thought that promotion should particularly target this age group and that the only way of knowing what would work is to speak with this group directly.
Recommendations

Findings from these two discussion groups would suggest that the partnership should concentrate its’ efforts on the following areas.

1.) Undertake more promotional work to make sure people know what offences they are going to be stopped for and what offences the ‘No Excuse’ campaign is targeting. This could be done through the use of road signs and/or the local media.

2.) More visible policing of certain types of offence such as tail gating and mobile phone use. More needs to be done so that people associate the ‘No Excuse’ campaign with these types of offences. Also, more promotion of prosecution statistics through the local media and road signs - people need to see and feel that drivers are being prosecuted for these types of offences.

3.) Continue to provide covert and overt enforcement measures. Some people thought that the only way of people realising that enforcement is increased in Dorset is by actually seeing the police undertaking enforcement activity. Others thought undercover policing was effective and increased use of this would make drivers feel that they could be caught at any time.

4.) Create new ways to promote the campaign in the local papers. Participants suggested that newspaper stories associated with the campaign needed to be more hard hitting and that the current excuses used for promotion made road safety seem like a bit of a joke.

5.) Continue to use road signs as a main tool for communicating and promoting the ‘No Excuse’ message. Use road signs to promote the number of prosecutions / KSI accidents in black spot areas. The new design of road signs were generally seen as a positive step so the campaign should roll these out throughout Dorset.

6.) Consider discontinuing the radio adverts, very few people had heard them and their effectiveness was questioned. Further research could be undertaken into audience numbers and listener demographics of local commercial radio. It was thought that audio and visual media promotion would be more effective carried out at a national level for example with association with the BBC.

7.) Ensure prosecutions happen and are promoted. Media reports focussing on people who have ‘got away’ with their offence on technicalities such as calibration of equipment or a wrong road name have had a negative affect on the campaign.

8.) Undertake further research with certain types of drivers, including those aged between 16 – 24, those who have been caught as part of the ‘No Excuse’ campaign, drivers who drive as part of their job (e.g. taxi drivers, lorry drivers) and drivers who live in Poole and Bournemouth, to see if they have noticed more enforcement activity since 2010 and what type of promotion would consider the most effective.