Driving

Driving Licences
You may find that there is some delay in getting a provisional licence, as the DVLA will often make a medical check with your own doctor before issuing the licence. If you have a history of seizures you will normally have had to be seizure-free for a year before getting a licence (if you only have seizures in your sleep this might be different). You can also not drive for 6 months after a shunt revision. Details of all the medical rules for obtaining a driving licence can be found on the DVLA website at www.dvla.gov.uk

Driving Assessments
Anyone with hydrocephalus or spina bifida should have an assessment before spending a lot of money on lessons and a car. Hydrocephalus can affect driving ability (for example how to judge speed and distances, co-ordination, concentration etc.) and it is important to see if this is likely to be a problem. Driving instructors may say that they will do an assessment but it is difficult for them to be truly independent.

An independent driving assessment is also really useful if you need to apply to Motability for a grant for a specially adapted vehicle: as some people with spina bifida need an automatic car with hand controls and maybe special seating, hoist etc.

An assessment could cost anything from £60 to over £100 but most people find this is money well spent. (It may be cheaper if you just want information on aids and adaptations). It consists of a medical assessment, usually a drive on a private roadway or in a driving simulator and an assessment by a professional like a physiotherapist or occupational therapist: you will have your vision tested and sometimes be asked to do a few perceptual tests.

For details of your nearest independent mobility centre contact:
The Forum of Mobility Centres, Queen Elizabeth’s Foundation Mobility Centre or Motability’s Customer Services – details overleaf under ‘Further Information’.

Driving Lessons
Only a limited number of people may now apply for help towards driving lessons through the Motability Scheme. They are:
• young drivers between 16 and 24 and receiving higher rate DLA Mobility Component.

Successful applicants will be given a grant to cover the cost of a two-hour trial lesson. If this is successful a grant for a further 10 lessons will be provided, during which time the theory test must be passed. A further grant for up to another 40 lessons may then be made.

You can no longer apply to Motability for driving lessons if you are 25 or over or for driving lessons for a carer.

To apply, contact Motability – Tel: 0845 456 4566. Details of instructors who have done a special training course for teaching disabled drivers are available from Queen Elizabeth’s Foundation Mobility Centre – Tel: 020 8770 1151. They can also tell you whether their learner vehicles are adapted. BSM has 200 instructors who have undertaken specialised mobility training to teach disabled people to drive. For more details contact them on 0845 851 9571 or contact your local branch directly.

The Association of Wheelchair Children - Tel: 0844 544 1050 will fund a course of 10 lessons for a wheelchair user of 16 or 17. The client must be sponsored by a professional and the AWC must be invoiced by a registered driving school using qualified driving instructors for 10 hours worth of lessons (for example 10 one hour lessons or 5 two hour lessons).
Financial Help with Adaptations

Motability have long waiting lists for applications to both the funds they administer for help with adaptations, so allow plenty of time by applying well before the time when you think you will need the vehicle. Some adaptations (such as standard hand controls) now come as part of the Motability package but Motability’s Charitable Grant can provide help towards others such as swivel seats or wheelchair hoists. They also have a Specialised Vehicles Fund to deal with more complex adaptations. If you are looking for help towards a vehicle which you can drive from your wheelchair, you will be assessed on a points-based system which takes into account factors such as:

- Employment / voluntary work / education
- Family responsibilities and whether these are shared or not
- Where you live
- Continuous mobility: whether you need this provision to keep driving
- Mileage – if you generally have high mileage
- Whether another driver is available to you

If you apply for Motability help you might find they advise you to approach voluntary organisations such as ASBAH for some additional help. Nationally ASBAH no longer has a grants budget though may have access to limited funds in some areas. Some local associations may help their members financially or your ASBAH adviser may be able to help you to apply to trusts which might help, though almost certainly not towards deposits. Again, you need to allow plenty of time for this. Motability will expect you to contribute a certain amount if this is your first application and, if you are living at home with your parents, Motability will take their financial details into account.

Theory Exam

This may be difficult for some people, especially those with hydrocephalus, so do ask about any extra help or time which may be available to you. You can subscribe to online training via the BSM website: www.bsm.co.uk.

Wheelchairs

If you are a wheelchair user, it is important for you to be able to get your wheelchair in and out of your car without help. You may need to look at hoists or special chairs or it may be possible to buy a really lightweight chair if you can’t manage those available from the wheelchair service. You might use the wheelchair service voucher system for this. Again, if you are on a low income, it is sometimes possible to raise some (but not all) financial help towards this, so contact ASBAH if you think you will need help.

Further information:

The following organisations may be contacted for information:

Queen Elizabeth’s Foundation Mobility Centre
Tel: 020 8770 1151 Fax: 020 8770 1211
Email: info@mobility-qe.org
Website: www.qefd.org/mobilitycentre

Mobilise Organisation (is the merger of the Disabled Drivers’ Motor Club and the Disabled Drivers’ Association)
Tel: 01508 489449 Fax: 01508 488173
Email: enquiries@mobilise.info
Website: www.mobilise.info

Motability
Tel: 0845 456 4566
Email: using general enquiries form (see link on website – ‘contact us’)
Website: www.motability.co.uk

The Association of Wheelchair Children
Tel: 0844 544 1050
Website: www.wheelchairchildren.org.uk

Forum of Mobility Centres
Tel: 0800 559 3636
Website: www.mobility-centres.org.uk

Help us

ASBAH relies on people’s generosity and support so we can help our clients who depend on us for help and advice - people with hydrocephalus, spina bifida, their families and carers. To donate to ASBAH please visit www.asbah.org or call 01733 421329.