

By Louise Hogan
Monday August 31 2009

Unqualified instructors face fines in new Garda safety push.

UNQUALIFIED driving instructors will be targeted in a joint crackdown by gardai and road safety authorities.

Hundreds of instructors are suspected of continuing to teach learners behind the wheel without being registered with the Road Safety Authority (RSA). Around 30 suspected illegal operators have been reported to the RSA's hotline.

Brian Farrell, spokesman with the RSA, confirmed a number of instructors were continuing to operate outside the law. Under new regulations, unregistered instructors face a fine of €2,000 and could be jailed for six months.

Mr Farrell appealed to learner drivers to ensure their instructors were fully ADI approved and to report any unqualified instructors. "We are actually planning enforcement activity with the gardai targeting instructors who are operating illegally," Mr Farrell said. "We are following up every complaint we get, where we don't get satisfaction we pass those details over to the gardai who are saying they will prosecute these cases."

A woman working at an established Dublin-based driving school said unqualified instructors were spotted giving lessons on a daily basis. "Many people are under the impression that it is an easy job and you can suit yourself with the hours," she said.

South Dublin driving instructor Thomas Papp, who has been teaching for 10-years, said no officials were checking whether instructors were registered. He said the unqualified instructors had "gone into hiding" around the end of July as the new legislation came into force but had since reemerged.

Mr Papp said the legislation was currently meaningless and some of the money used to pay for the qualification should be used to raise public awareness. "I do everything by the book when it comes to business, everyone else ignoring it makes it very difficult to work," he said.

The RSA sent letters to anyone who had been reported operating illegally, and if they failed to respond their details were forwarded to the gardai.

A spokesman for the National Association of Approved Driving Instructors (NAADI) urged the RSA to introduce a system whereby fully qualified instructors were immediately identifiable to learners by a symbol or an ADI approved sign on their vehicle.

There are currently more than 1,600 ADI's on the register, with a number of others in the process of completing the three-stage exam at a minimum cost of €800. All registered instructors must also show they are tax compliant and have been vetted by a garda.