

Hazards on the road ahead

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Learner drivers are being invited to test how good — or bad — they are at spotting potential hazards on the road, with the help of University of Nottingham researchers.

Learners are being offered the chance to use the very latest driving simulator at the University to help them sharpen their driving skills —while getting paid in the process.

Psychologists are looking for 200 learner drivers to take part in a study looking at the way that novice drivers can become distracted, and how they react to common potential hazards that are faced by drivers on the road every day.

And as well as helping them to prepare for their own driving tests with the latest high-tech equipment, volunteers will be aiding research aimed at increasing safety on UK roads in the future.

The researchers are keen to hear from learners aged between 17 and 25, who have had six or more on-road lessons and who are learning to drive in the UK.

They will be put through their paces in a driving simulator recently installed in a laboratory at the School of Psychology. While ‘driving’, participants wear a special helmet with a sensitive device installed for tracking eye movement. They then follow a route which involves various hazards, and the simulator not only detects how they respond to the hazards, but exactly where they look at each stage of the journey.

Learner drivers will be able to use Risk Awareness package currently offered in driving centres run by BSM, the UK's largest driving school. This involves driving in the simulator, watching a training video detailing certain aspects of hazard perception and then completing a further drive in the simulator. This should take less than one hour and each volunteer will be paid £7 for taking part.

Dr Lyn Jackson, one of the organisers of the study, said: "This package was designed by BSM to improve hazard awareness and we are inviting 200 learners to have it for free.

"The simulator is a real boon to learner drivers because they can encounter hazardous situations, and learn from them, without any actual physical risk.

"Given that hazard perception is a skill that learner drivers need to develop to pass their driving test any extra practice they can get will be beneficial."

New drivers are involved in a disproportionately high number of accidents in the UK, and research suggests one factor might be the way they react when potential hazards appear on the road. One of the main differences between novice and experienced drivers is that novices tend to want to look either straight ahead, or down at the dashboard, while experienced drivers pay much more attention to their surroundings rather than their own car.

The University of Nottingham researchers hope that their findings will be used to help train new drivers to be more aware of hazards and better able to deal with them.

Source: University of Nottingham

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