Sensitivity to reward and risky driving, risky decision making, and risky health behaviour: A literature review
Scott-Parker, B. & Weston, L. (2017)
Transportation Research Part F: Traffic Psychology and Behaviour, 49, 93-109
doi: 10.1016/j.trf.2017.05.008
The full article is accessible at – http://bit.ly/2wXEiWU

Why do this research?
Young drivers are complex creatures. Many in road safety simply think of them as someone who sits behind the wheel and operates a vehicle, forgetting that it is normal for a teenager to take risks, to want to impress their mates, to test boundaries, and sometimes to actively test rules. Some of that happens on the road, where young drivers can end up seriously hurt or killed in a car crash.

We want to look at what we know about sensitivity to reward, and how this can impact on driving behaviour.

What did we do?
We searched and synthesised the literature about sensitivity to reward and risks, including risky driving, risky decision making, and risky health behaviour, to obtain a more complete picture of what places our young drivers at greater risk.

What did we find?
Generally, young drivers who have greater sensitivity to rewards engaged in more risky driving behaviours, including speeding, and they have greater crash involvement and more police-detected offences. Greater reward sensitivity is also related to more risky decision making generally, and other health risk behaviours, such as drinking alcohol under age, excessive drinking of alcohol, and drug use. We also found that reward sensitivity was heightened when the young driver was in the presence of friends, which may explain some of the greater crash risk found when young drivers carry their friends as passengers.

What does it mean?
We need to step back from young driver road safety and think more comprehensively. Young drivers are teens who are vulnerable to peer influence, and have a heightened reward sensitivity, therefore they are particularly vulnerable to poor road outcomes as a consequence. Various interventions, for example, an alcohol-related intervention, can have benefits for other realms of risk, such as reducing alcohol-related road crashes.