Welcome to the School of Psychology Newsletter, Summer 2018

Welcome to our freshly styled newsletter. The beautiful cherry blossom trees in full bloom on our campus signal the end of a busy and productive spring semester. Students completed their exams during the sunny and warm month of May, and our final year students will transform from undergraduates to graduates this summer in the grand setting of Elphinstone Hall. Congratulations to you all!

Many of our undergraduates have been engaged in extra activities that boosted their academic and personal accomplishments. They presented at and attended the British Psychological Society conference in Glasgow (page 5), helped organise a Brain Bee event (page 6), and acquired a range of extra skills via workplace and lab-based internships (page 8). Our MSc in Foundations of Clinical Psychology students presented their work to staff and peers at a successful poster session in May, and all our postgraduates are still hard at work pursuing their thesis projects over the summer. We look forward to celebrating their achievements when they graduate in winter.

Our staff and students have enjoyed a great deal of recent success in securing funding for research projects (pages 2-3 and page 9) and research internships (page 8), ensuring that the months ahead will continue to be vibrant and productive in our School. Here's to a long and sunny summer!

Dr Margaret Jackson, Director of Communications
Human cognition is extremely flexible. We are able to respond in very different ways from one moment to the next, and in everyday life we frequently have to change the way we respond because either the situation or our goal has changed. For instance, when driving, we might switch rapidly between the following “tasks”: visually assessing potential hazards at a junction; accelerating past another vehicle; performing an emergency stop. From laboratory studies, we know that switching tasks usually leads to slowed responses, and that we occasionally even repeat the previous task in error. The existence of this “switch cost” reveals that some aspect of the previous task must persist in some way to affect the speed or accuracy of our subsequent behaviour, even though we know that it is no longer relevant. In this project, we wish to find out about what causes this cost of switching between tasks.

In particular, we will investigate whether there are differential contributions to the switch cost from what we previously knew versus what we previously did. To address this question, we will look for the existence of a switch cost on the trial following either i) preparing the task but not performing it or ii) preparing and performing the task.

We will conduct a series of experiments in which people make simple judgements of visual stimuli, e.g. coloured shapes. On all trials we will tell them which task to prepare (e.g. “make a judgment based on colour” vs. “make a judgment based on shape”). On most trials, a coloured shape would then be presented (e.g. a blue circle), and the participant would press a button to perform the task (in this case, they would indicate that the colour was blue). Crucially, however, on some trials there will be no opportunity to perform the prepared task (e.g., the participant may be presented with no coloured shape or with a coloured shape that does not indicate which button to press); in this case, participants still have to prepare a task but do not actually perform it. We will compare switch costs measured after performing a prepared task with switch costs measured after merely preparing a task. We aim to find out in what ways the switch cost driven by preparation may differ from that driven by performance, and what causes these types of switch cost to be established and abolished.

FIND OUT MORE:
Web: www.abdn.ac.uk/psychology/people/profiles/r.swainson

This project is funded by the ESRC and will be conducted by Dr Rachel Swainson (left) in collaboration with Dr Motonori Yamaguchi from Edge Hill University (right).
Memory Representations in Native and Non-native Speakers

Dr Agnieszka Konopka’s recent EPS-funded project aims to explain how linguistic proficiency influences memory accuracy.

Most of the information we process every day is linguistic in nature: we listen and talk to people, we read and write emails, etc. But in addition to being our primary means of communication, language can also shape what we remember from our linguistic exchanges with other people. Normally, we tend to remember the content of someone’s speech but we have poor memory for the wording of individual sentences; in other words, we remember what our conversational partners might have said (gist memory) but not how they said it (verbatim memory). Interestingly, the memory traces of native speakers and fluent non-native speakers of a language differ in linguistic detail: non-native speakers have better verbatim recall than native speakers because they pay closer attention to sentence wording.

The goal of this research is to test a stronger hypothesis about linguistic experience and memory – namely that retaining verbatim details from short sentences can also support accurate recall of sentence gist. We do this by comparing rates of gist errors in native and non-native speakers for the types of linguistic input we receive on a daily basis (descriptions of simple events like The man is trying to fix the car). The results will inform theories in cognitive psychology regarding the dependence of memory representations on language.

FIND OUT MORE:
Web: www.abdn.ac.uk/psychology/profiles/agnieszka.konopka

Group Stereotypes: From “You” to “Them”

Dr Doug Martin talks about how episodic memories for individual people result in the formation of group stereotypes.

We were recently awarded funding under the Experimental Psychology Society’s (EPS) small grants scheme to undertake a new line of enquiry examining the formation of social stereotypes (e.g., Scottish people are miserly, scientists are geeky, men like the colour blue). This research will focus on how people’s memories for specific events (i.e., episodic memories) are transformed into rule-based memory systems (i.e., semantic knowledge).

Specifically, we will examine how people’s episodic memories of their encounters with individual people relates to the formation of semantic knowledge about the social categories to which those people belong.

Previous research suggests that when people encounter lots of other people who belong to different social groups, they tend to infer semantic relationships about the groups that, in reality, did not exist in their episodic encounters with individual group members. However, much of this research probes the impressions people form about target groups by asking them to make group-level judgements (e.g., “Which group would be more likely to exhibit positive behaviours?”). Because previous investigations have not probed perceiver’s memories for the behaviours of individual targets (e.g., “Which person exhibited behaviour X?”), we do not know whether perceiver’s episodic memories mirror the errant semantic knowledge they report for the groups to which targets belong.

The proposed research hopes to go some way to bridging this gap in our understanding.

FIND OUT MORE:
Web: personperceptionlab.org/
Email: doug.martin@abdn.ac.uk
A PhD Story: Follow (or Ignore) My Eyes!

Stephen Hayward, part-time PhD student, explains his research on age effects in attentional orienting to social and non-social cues.

We develop spontaneous monitoring of eye gaze direction in early infancy. This forms the basis of our ability to engage in joint attention, where we share the focus of our attention to a person, object or event using the visual cue of another’s gaze during social interactions. Engaging in joint attention aids social communication and is a means via which we can interpret the intentions of others.

Previous research into age effects in adult attentional orienting has primarily investigated our reflexive response to visual cues which are both social (eyes) and non-social (typically directional arrows) in nature. Much of this research has focused on participant reaction time to a target that follows the presentation of a non-predictive visual cue stimulus, and has typically used a single short time interval (e.g. 200 milliseconds) between cue and target presentation. This type of experimental presentation typically measures reflexive, or automatic, shifts of attention. If gaze is followed reflexively then participants are faster to locate a target which appears in a jointly attended location. This research has suggested significant differences in reflexive attentional orienting responses between younger adults (aged 18 to 30) and older adults (aged 65+) particularly to social cues, which may negatively impact on older adults’ ability to engage in joint attention.

However, there has been little systematic examination of age effects in voluntary or controlled attentional orienting, which unfolds over longer time periods and is important for more strategic responses to gaze during social interaction. My research aims to investigate age effects in both reflexive and volitional aspects of attentional response, to both social and non-social visual cues, by using a range of ‘stimulus to target’ time intervals. I also vary the predictiveness (or helpfulness) of the visual cue in terms of the proportion of time it correctly indicates where the target will appear. The aim of my research is to increase our understanding of healthy aging effects in attentional control, and whether any observed effects are uniquely social or reflect more general differences in attentional response.

I am just approaching the conclusion of data gathering in the second experimental phase of my research, and initial analysis suggests some interesting and significant differences in how younger and older adults orient their attention, particularly in response to unhelpful gaze cues.

I am self-funding my PhD and my aim is to extend my research into investigation of cognitively impaired adults’ ability to reflexively and volitionally orient attention, in response to social and non-social cues, in comparison to healthily aging adults.

As a part-time student I fit my research around my family, my job, and my cycling hobby (and my collecting of colourful lycra cycling jerseys!). I work full-time in aviation, an industry where the application of Psychology in the workplace has had a significant and ongoing positive effect on safety.

FIND OUT MORE:
If you would like to learn more about my research, conducted in collaboration with Dr Margaret Jackson and Professor Louise Phillips, I can be contacted at r02sah15@abdn.ac.uk
British Psychological Society Scottish Undergraduate Conference

Some of our students also contributed an article in Write Brain, the first ever magazine produced for the BPS conference by the University of Glasgow’s Psychology Society. Laura Cowie (3rd year) wrote about whether mindfulness is a promising clinical treatment. Isla Dondalson (4th year) discussed mental health discrepancies between Eastern and Western cultures. Andrei Birladeanu (3rd year) wrote an article on approaches to studying cognitive science. Tanya Bhayani (3rd year) explained the reality of studying Psychology, addressing the myth that it is an unscientific subject.

The BPS-Scotland undergraduate conference is a popular and successful annual event, hosted by a different Institution each year. It is a great opportunity for students to hone their communication and networking skills, and shape their career aspirations.

FIND OUT MORE:
Visit the The British Psychology Society online at www.bps.org.uk

It was a great experience, telling others about my thesis project, as well as listening to so many fascinating talks in such varying fields. It’s a brilliant opportunity to meet others who share your interest in the field of Psychology.

Saga Svensson, 4th year

I was grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the ‘Write-Brain’ magazine alongside others at the University. It allowed us to display our involvement in Psychology through other methods aside from presenting, and feel a sense of community.

Tanya Bhayani, 3rd year
Students Help Organise Brain Bee Event

A group of second and third year undergraduate Psychology students organised a local Brain Bee event in Aberdeen in February 2018, coordinated and managed by Ludmila Kucikova (year 3). Students from the Business School and Medical/Biomedical Sciences also volunteered.

The Brain Bee aims to motivate 14-18 year olds to learn more about the human brain and inspire them to consider a career in neuroscience or neuropsychology. It is styled similar to a Spelling Bee, with the competition at a local, national, and international level.

Two of our students visited local secondary schools where they gave a presentation on Biological Psychology and Neuroscience to 14-18 year olds and promoted the competition. They held a Question and Answer session afterwards and teacher feedback was very positive. At the Aberdeen Science Centre, a group of around 10 school pupils took part in the Brain Bee competition in which they had to answer questions on Neuroscience and complete a series of practical challenges, such as patient diagnosis and labelling brain anatomy. The top three pupils were selected and they will take part in the National Level Brain Bee competition in Nottingham.

The event was supported by Professor Louise Phillips from the School of Psychology, Dr Guy Bewick and Dr Steven Tucker from the Institute of Medical Sciences, Dr Ann Rajnicek, and Dr Matteo Santoro from the Aberdeen Neuroscience group.

FIND OUT MORE:
Visit the Brain Bee website at www.thebrainbee.org

I gained valuable experience in organising a neuroscience competition, preparing materials for the competition, communicating with schools, and fundraising for the initiative.

Zuzana Suchomelova, Team Leader for Fundraising

When the opportunity to motivate young students to study brain mysteries arose, I wanted to point out how incredible brain science is.

Ludmila Kucikova, Coordinator

Events and school visits organised by Brain Bee give secondary school pupils a great opportunity to explore various aspects of neuroscience beyond the school curriculum.

Vilma Pullinen, Team Leader for School Engagement

Brain Bee Team from left: Pavel Juranek (Coordinator, Business School), Vilma Pullinen (Team Leader for School Engagement, Psychology), Zuzana Suchomelova (Team Leader for Fundraising, Psychology), Malwina Filipczuk (Volunteer, Psychology), Simona Dulajova (Volunteer, Biomedical Sciences), Ludmila Kucikova (Coordinator, Psychology), Jonas Kjaersgaard (Volunteer, Psychology).

Other volunteers: Patrycja Domeradzka (Psychology), Layla Shaheen (Medical Sciences), Jasmine Paneva (Psychology).
Our Students, Doing More

Some of our undergraduate students tell us about the additional lab-based and workplace career enhancement opportunities they gained whilst studying in the School of Psychology.

Cosmin Manolescu, Year 4, BSc Psychology with German

I was a summer research intern on an eye-tracking study with Prof. Ben Tatler, funded by the RANK prize fund, that was a continuation of my Level 3 methodology project. I helped with experiment design, recruitment and participant testing, data analysis, and wrote a short review of the project to be presented to the funding body.

I gained first-hand experience organizing test sessions, setting up the eye-tracker, and making sure participants understood the task. I learned about working with R, exploring different statistical methods of analysing the data, and designing useful graphs. All of this gave me the confidence to work with an eye-tracker, which enabled me to use this methodology for my thesis project.

Caris Agnew, Year 3, BSc Psychology

During the summer I volunteered in Tamar House, a safe house for female survivors of sexual exploitation, located in North England. This was set up by anti-human trafficking charity Invisible Traffick who I volunteer for in Northern Ireland, so I got in touch with the director to see if I could visit. My role was to oversee the daily activities conducted by myself and other volunteers, such as mindfulness, counselling, reflexology, and cooking.

Dealing with trauma is a complex, long, and painful process. Some of the survivors had been abused and sold by their families. But the resilience of humans is amazing. Tamar House was the first time some of the women experienced true love, in a family home, and I believe that is vital for recovery.

FIND OUT MORE: www.invisibletraffick-gb.org/tamar/

Kathryn Corsico, Year 4, MA Psychology

For the past two years I have assisted voluntarily in Dr. Devin Ray’s lab. Last year I worked on a project about the cross-race effect. I created the stimuli and assisted with the coding of the study, data collection, and data analysis. This experience gave me the necessary skills to be selected for a paid position this year in Dr. Sandie Cleland’s lab.

This experience helped me become more proficient in SPSS. I also learned how to code a study in Inquisit and how to process raw data files. I also learned more about an area of psychology I am very interested in. This work has benefited me in many ways. I was able to code my thesis relatively quickly and I will also be more efficient with data analysis because of this experience.
Undergraduate Success

Congratulations to all of our students graduating this summer!

You have each experienced your own academic and personal journey, and have achieved more than you may know. From all of us in the School of Psychology, it has been a pleasure and you have done us proud.

We extend our congratulations to our undergraduate prize winners. Well done on your outstanding achievements!

Undergraduate Student Prizes 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIZE</th>
<th>REASON FOR PRIZE</th>
<th>WINNER</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Psychological Society Undergraduate Award</td>
<td>Best across Levels 3 &amp; 4 Psychology</td>
<td>Isla Donaldson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Henry Prize in Mental Philosophy (Logic)</td>
<td>Best in Level 4 Psychology</td>
<td>Kostadin Karavasilev</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alan B. Milne Memorial Prize</td>
<td>Best Undergraduate Thesis (Psychology)</td>
<td>Pauliina Vuorinen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anderson Prize</td>
<td>Best in Level 3 Psychology</td>
<td>Laura Cowie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anderson Prize</td>
<td>Best in Level 2 with Psychology intention</td>
<td>Anna De Wet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anderson Prize</td>
<td>Best in Level 1 with Psychology intention</td>
<td>Gilliane Nopere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovering Research Award</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zhasmina Paneva</td>
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Summer Research Internships

Congratulations to the following students on securing a paid research internship this summer. Good luck with your projects!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERNSHIP AWARD</th>
<th>STUDENT</th>
<th>SUPERVISOR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bradshaw-Eagle Undergraduate Research Scholarship, Applied Vision Association</td>
<td>Sanni Ahonen</td>
<td>Dr Jasna Martinovic and Prof Benjamin Tatler</td>
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<tr>
<td>British Psychological Society</td>
<td>Auste Simkute</td>
<td>Dr Gillian Slessor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Carnegie Trust Vacation Scholarship</td>
<td>Laura Cowie</td>
<td>Prof Louise Phillips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Psychology Society Undergraduate Research Bursary</td>
<td>Vilma Pullinen</td>
<td>Dr Margaret Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RANK Prize fund</td>
<td>Andrei Birladeanu</td>
<td>Dr Constanze Hesse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RANK Prize fund</td>
<td>Juho Matinpoika Ajala</td>
<td>Dr Karin Pilz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellcome Biomedical Vacation Scholarship</td>
<td>Jacqueline von Seth</td>
<td>Dr Karin Pilz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Scientist; Development Trust, University of Aberdeen</td>
<td>Roisin Harrison</td>
<td>Dr Dannette Marie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Scientist; Development Trust, University of Aberdeen</td>
<td>Ludmila Kucikova</td>
<td>Dr Søren Andersen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovering Research; Development Trust, University of Aberdeen</td>
<td>Mairead Redmond</td>
<td>Dr Philip Benson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Psychology</td>
<td>Amy Wakefield</td>
<td>Dr Sandie Cleland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Psychology</td>
<td>Carlotta Schwertel</td>
<td>Dr Lynden Miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBSRC eastbio Research Experience Placement Scheme</td>
<td>Antoniya Boyanova</td>
<td>Dr Jasna Martinovic and Dr Søren Andersen</td>
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Recent Activities

Research funding and awards

Dr Jasna Martinovic and Dr Rama Chakravarthi have successfully secured a £330,000 BBSRC grant on “Neural mechanisms of long-range spatial vision: an investigation of perceptive, integrative and association fields across the lifespan”.

Dr Rachel Swainson has successfully secured a £330,000 ESRC grant on task switching in collaboration with Dr Motonori Yamaguchi from Edge Hill University, UK.

Prof Louise Phillips has successfully secured a £128,461 Newton-Ungku Omar Fund Institutional Links UK-Malaysia grant on “Social cognition and executive function in older adults in the UK and Malaysia: links to socio-economic factors” in collaboration with Dr Yong Min Hooi from Sunway University, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia.

Dr Sandie Cleland, Dr Agnieszka Konopka, Dr Doug Martin, Dr Chu Mingyuan and Dr Gillian Slessor have all successfully secured EPS grants to support their research activities.

PhD student Gabi Lipan won the first prize for the best poster presentation at a PhD Networking Event hosted by Skills Development Scotland. Gabi is currently undertaking an SDS co-funded PhD studentship on “Mind the Gap: An Investigation into the Factors Influencing Student, Academic and Employer Perceptions of Graduate Attributes”.

PhD student Francesco Pupillo successfully secured two travel grants from the Guarantors of Brain (£800) and the EPS (£500) to present his work on mood and age effects in prospective memory at the International Conference on Prospective Memory in Melbourne, Australia in January 2018.

Public engagement

Dr Soren Andersen and Dr Nika Adamian participated at the Mayfest with a demonstration on attention research, 26th May.

Dr Sandie Cleland gave a talk at Café Philosophique in Westhill on “A Head for Numbers: Numerical cognition across the lifespan”, 14th March.

Dr Jacqui Hutchison gave a talk on stereotypes and psychology to local primary school children during the British Science Week in March.

Dr Amy Irwin and PhD student Oliver Hamlet did an Industry engagement event on nontechnical skills in agriculture, 26th of April.

Dr Clare Kirtley and Dr Chris Luke ran a daylong event at the Science Centre about vision and perception, 15th April.

Dr Chris Luke and Dr Gillian Slessor did demonstrations on social attention at the Aberdeen Science Centre in March, as part of Science Discovery Day and British Science Week. Supported by Masters student Gosia Kasprzyk.

Dr Emily Nordman gave a talk at Café Philosophique in Balmedie on “Bilingualism and Figurative Language”, 5th February.

Prof Louise Phillips gave a talk at Café Scientifique on “Intergenerational Communication: Aging and Social Attention”, 23rd May.

Dr Mingyuan Chu gave a public lecture at the May festival on the use of nonverbal behaviours to detect the indirect messages in a conversation, 26th May.

During this year’s May Fest, Dr Emily Nordmann performed stand-up comedy during the Aberdeen (Uni’s) Got Talent contest, 25th May.
Recent Activities ctd.

Ever wondered about situation awareness? Keen to maximise your safety? Find out more in the recent Conversation article written by Dr Amy Irwin and PhD student Oliver Hamlet. http://theconversation.com/how-situation-awareness-could-save-your-life-96032

The School of Psychology was one of the first Schools to use lecture recordings. Dr. Emily Nordmann has been writing for wonkHE on the subject of lecture capture policies. https://wonkhe.com/blogs/capturing-the-lecture/


Dr Chris Luke demonstrates eye tracking at the Aberdeen Science Centre. An 8-year old volunteer has fun blasting meteorites with his eyes.

Publications

Key: Current academic staff, research fellows/assistants, postgraduates, undergraduates


Publications cont.


FIND OUT MORE:
www.abdn.ac.uk/psychology/

For Your Diaries
Anderson Lecture 2018

We are thrilled to announce that the School’s flagship public engagement event, the annual Anderson lecture, will be given by Professor Lisa Feldman Barrett from Northeastern University, Boston. The event takes place on the evening of Tuesday 2nd October 2018 in the James Mackay Hall (Kings Conference Centre).

Professor Feldman Barrett – director of the Interdisciplinary Affective Science Laboratory – focuses on the study of emotion, and has recently published a ground-breaking book on how our brains construct emotions.

This is a free ticketed event so if you are interested in attending, please check our School of Psychology events webpage: www.abdn.ac.uk/psychology/news-events.php.

Find out more:
lisafeldmanbarrett.com/
Keeping Up With The News
For more information about what we are up to in the School please visit our website, follow us on Facebook and Twitter, or get in touch with us via e-mail or phone.

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