

# Psychology News

School of Psychology, University of Aberdeen

## Welcome

As we reach the end of a very busy session and look to summer, it is a good time to reflect on what has been an inspiring and engaging spring semester for The School of Psychology. We hosted two hugely successful Undergraduate events: the British Psychological Society Undergraduate Conference and the annual employability network event. Both of these were excellent opportunities for Undergraduates to network, share ideas and meet a range of professionals in their field. We continued our commitment to public engagement with our high profile annual Anderson Lecture, which this year was an entertaining and engaging presentation by Professor Richard Wiseman on the Psychology of Luck. Our staff and students also provided exhibitions, activities and talks for this year's May Festival.

We are particularly proud of the excellent results achieved by this year's graduating students and we are looking forward to celebrating their successes with them at Graduation. The summer promises to be another busy time for research and we are pleased that six of our undergraduates have been successful in securing funds to carry out research projects in the School over the coming weeks.

- Professor Ben Tatler



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Samantha Gregory explains the importance of where someone else is looking for what we remember

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The School of Psychology hosted this year's British Psychological Society Undergraduate Conference

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## To the class of 2016...

What makes a psychology graduate? We could tell you how many lectures, practicals, tutorials, SPSS classes, critical review groups, project meetings, and thesis meetings you (should) have attended. We could tell you how many assignments, essays, reports, exams, wikis, and debates you've completed. We could tell you the BPS accreditation requirements you've met and how many course credits you've earned. All of this



information would be entirely accurate yet completely miss the point. Your degree is more than the bit of paper you will get on June 14th because regardless of what happens to that bit of paper - whether you frame it, put it in a drawer for safe-keeping, or accidentally lose it in a last-minute house move - the knowledge and skills that bit of paper represents will stay with you for life. Over the last four years you've grown from nervous Freshers into confident, capable psychologists and whilst we've had a part to play in that, you're here because of your hard work and dedication.

From all of us in the School of Psychology, congratulations, you've done us proud and we know you will continue to do so!

We would also like to say congratulations to our prize winners across all levels of the degree programme for their outstanding achievements this year.

Prize	Reason for award	Winner
British Psychological Society Undergraduate Award	Best across Level 3 and Level 4 Psychology	Jess Kerr-Gaffney
Henry Prize in Mental Philosophy (Logic)	Best in Level 4 Psychology	Sarah Thurley
Alan B. Milne Memorial Prize	Best undergraduate thesis (Psychology)	Gabi Lipan
Anderson Prize	Best in Level 4 Behavioural Studies	Christel Behrens
Anderson Prize	Best undergraduate thesis (Behavioural Studies)	Christel Behrens
Anderson Prize	Best in Level 3 Psychology	Ilinca-Ruxandra Tone
Anderson Prize	Best in Level 2 with Psychology intention	Isla Donaldson
Anderson Prize	Best in Level 1 with Psychology intention	Ilara Dal Lago

## Sarcasm is lost on the older generation

Dr. Wendy Skene explains recent work from Professor Louise Phillips



Older adults are not as good at detecting sarcasm as their younger counterparts according to research from the University of Aberdeen.

Led by Professor Louise Phillips, Chair in Psychology, the team reported that adults over 65 were more likely to misinterpret sarcastic comments and take the literal meaning, rather than the intended jibe.

Professor Phillips said: “Losing the ability to respond appropriately to sarcasm might affect our relationships and friendships as we age. We already know that engaging in social interactions is valuable, particularly as we age, and we were interested in finding out how the normal ageing process might affect our ability to understand subtle social cues such as sarcasm.”

In the study, published in *Developmental Psychology*, older adults were shown examples of conversations between people and asked them to judge whether the exchange was sarcastic or not. Professor Phillips and the team, including collaborators from the

University of Geneva and University College London, found that younger and middle-aged adults were significantly better at identifying sarcasm than older adults.

Professor Phillips said: “Until now, no one has looked at how older adults interpret sarcasm, and specifically, if they can flip the literal meaning to understand the intended meaning. So, we are interested in finding out how whether our ability to understand other people’s intentions changes as we age.

“For example, if someone says ‘I see you’re on time as usual’, this could literally mean what it says. Or, there might be a sarcastic intention, and then the underlying message is ‘You’re late. As usual.’ Deciding which way to interpret the statement depends on the context, and also the speaker’s tone of voice and facial expression. How this is interpreted can obviously affect the outcome of the conversation and ultimately determine how relationships develop.

“We found that older people were worse at detecting sarcasm and more likely to take the literal meaning than both younger and middle aged adults. This difference could not be explained by misunderstanding the conversation or memory difficulties.

“However, in some situations it might be a good thing to misinterpret sarcasm, given that it can sometimes be considered nasty or derogatory. Older adults are known to have a more positive outlook on life than younger adults and this may contribute to their failure to pick up on sarcastic undertones.”

### FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

Phillips, L. H., Allen, R., Bull, R., Hering, A., Kliegel, M., & Channon, S. (2015). Older adults have difficulty in decoding sarcasm. *Developmental Psychology*, 51(12), 1840-1852.

This work has been attracting a lot of media interest, and has been written about in *The Time* and *The Telegraph*, and has been featured on STV news and BBC Radio Scotland to name but a few.

## Helping our undergraduates meet their future employers

Dr Amy Irwin writes about this year's networking event to provide our 3rd and 4th years with a chance to meet potential employers



Psychologists, a range of Psychotherapists, Educational Psychologists, PR and Marketing professionals, Human Factors specialists and Counsellors. Feedback from both professionals and students was positive: The professional attendees reported that our students seemed motivated, articulate and highly prepared. The students reported that the professionals were approachable, informative and that they appreciated the range of speakers from different career areas. Overall the event was a success, with both students and professionals forging new contacts for the future.

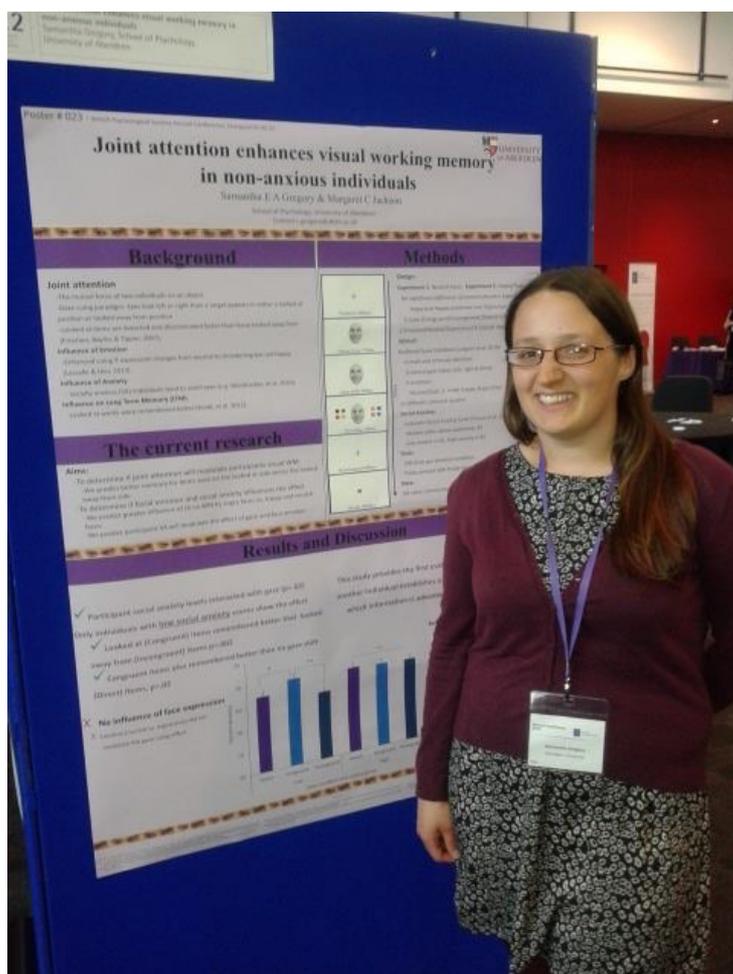
Each year the School of Psychology hosts a networking event for our L3 and L4 students as part of our Employability strategy. The aim of the event is to enhance the networking skills of our students, thereby increasing their self-efficacy and preparing them for such events post-graduation. We are also keen to enable them to meet and chat to a variety of professionals; feedback from past events indicates this can lead to future offers of work experience and other opportunities. The session has two aspects; freestyle networking, where students and professionals can mingle to share information, and a series of informal presentations, labelled 'drop-in sessions'.

This year more than 100 students were in attendance, alongside more than 50 professional attendees, including; Clinical



## Follow me: how our memory is influenced by where someone else is looking

Samantha Gregory, a third-year PhD student, explains how where someone else looks can influence not only what we pay attention to but also what we remember



Just as the saying states, the eyes are the window to the soul - where people look tells us something about their direction of attention, and therefore their immediate goals and motivations. Thus, eye gaze is an important social signal with infants following gaze from three months. This gaze following develops into joint attention, whereby two individuals create a social connection by looking at each other, before one looks to a location of interest. If the other social partner then follows their gaze they have engaged in joint attention.

When investigated under laboratory conditions using a face on a computer screen - which establishes joint attention by looking first at the participant and then to the side of the screen - it is found that this gaze following behaviour is difficult to suppress. Participants will make faster responses to items looked at by the face (jointly attended), than to items that are looked away from (not jointly attended).

My PhD specifically investigates what happens to the jointly attended information past this initial point of attention. Once we locate information we process it using working memory, enabling the information to contribute to immediate, goal directed behaviour. Therefore I have been testing the impact of joint attention on working memory, by investigating if items (coloured squares) are remembered better when initially viewed in the presence of another's gaze, than when the items are looked away from. I have found that this is indeed the case, which indicates that not only do we share a person's focus of attention, but we also share their immediate goals. Memory for jointly attended items may be enhanced via 'social tuning', which raises the importance and value of objects in our environment.

### FIND OUT MORE

For more about this work that Samantha has been carrying out in collaboration with Dr. Madge Jackson, please contact Samantha ([s.gregory@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:s.gregory@abdn.ac.uk))

## The British Psychological Society Undergraduate Conference

The School of Psychology hosted the British Psychological Society (BPS) Undergraduate Conference 2016 on the 26th of March at the University of Aberdeen. About 250 undergrads from all across the UK participated in the event.

After a Welcome note from Professor Peter McGeorge (VP of Teaching and Learning, University of Aberdeen), an opening address by BPS President Professor Peter Kindermann and a keynote speech by Dr Fiona Summers, it was time for the students to present their research. During two sessions in the morning and the afternoon, about 90 students presented in 14 symposia. Their talks covered all areas of psychology including clinical, social, biological, cognitive, occupational, perceptual, educational, health, personality and developmental psychology. Prizes were awarded for the best overall conference presentation and the best presentation within each research area. Overall, the quality of the talks was impressive. They were very well attended and often followed by interesting questions.

In the afternoon, a psychology futures fair was organized with many professionals from a range of disciplines and employers from areas relevant to Psychology taking part. The students had the chance to chat with them about possible career paths and ways to enhance ones employability.

The event organized by Dr Emily Nordmann and a group of student volunteers was a great success and gave the participants the opportunity to present and discuss their work, network with professionals and employers and socialise with each other. Many colleagues from our school contributed to it by reviewing abstracts beforehand, chairing sessions at the conference or participating actively in the psychology futures fair.



## Recent activity

As an internationally leading research School and a world class teaching unit we are constantly involved in publishing our work, obtaining funding and gaining recognition for our activities. In the following pages we list some of these recent activities.

### PUBLICATIONS

Key: **members of academic staff**, **postgraduate students**, **undergraduate students**

**Agnew**, H. C., **Phillips**, L. H., & **Pilz**, K. S. (2016). Global form and motion processing in healthy ageing. *Acta Psychologica*, *166*, 12-20

Altgassen, M., Kretschmer, A., & **Schnitzspahn**, K. M. (in press). Future thinking instructions improve prospective memory performance in adolescents. *Child Neuropsychology*.

**Andersen**, S. K. & Müller, M. M. (2015). Driving steady-state visual evoked potentials at arbitrary frequencies using temporal interpolation of stimulus presentation. *BMC Neuroscience*, *16* (95), 1-10.

Ballhausen, N., Mahy, C. E. V., Hering, A., Voigt, B., **Schnitzspahn**, K. M., Lagner, P., Ihle, A., & Kliegel, M. (In press). Children's planning performance in the zoo map task (BADs-C): Is it driven by general cognitive ability, executive functioning, or prospection? *Applied Neuropsychology: Child*.

**Cseh**, G.M., **Phillips**, L.H. & Pearson, D.G. (2016). Mental and perceptual feedback in the development of creative flow. *Consciousness and Cognition*, *42*, 150-161. DOI: 10.1016/j.concog.2016.03.011

Dimitrova, D. V., **Chu**, M., Wang, L., Ozyurek, A., & Hagoort, P. (in press). Beat that word: How listeners integrate beat gesture and focus in multimodal speech discourse. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*.

**Clarke**, A. D. F., Green, M. J., Chantler, M. J., & **Hunt**, A. R. (2016). Human search for a target on a textured background is consistent with a stochastic model. *Journal of Vision*, *16* (7), 4-4.

**Gregory**, S. E. A. & **Jackson**, M. C. (in press). Joint attention enhances visual working memory. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, & Cognition*.

**Jager**, B. & **Cleland**, A. A. (2016). Polysemy advantage with abstract but not concrete words. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, *45*, 143-156. DOI: 10.1007/S10936-014-9337-Z

**Jager**, B., Green, M. J., & **Cleland**, A. A. (2016). Polysemy in the mental lexicon: Relatedness and frequency affect representational overlap. *Language Cognition and Neuroscience*, *31*, 425-429. DOI: 10.1080/23273798.2015.1105986

Jennings, B. J., & **Martinovic**, J. (accepted). Combining S-cone and luminance signals adversely affects discrimination of objects within backgrounds. *Scientific reports*.

**Kerr-Gaffney**, J. E., **Hunt**, A. R., & **Pilz**, K. S. (2016). Local form interference in biological motion perception. *Attention, Perception, & Psychophysics*, 1-10. Epub ahead of print.

Kliegel, M., Ballhausen, N., Hering, A., Ihle, A., **Schnitzspahn**, K. M., & Zuber, S. (2016). Prospective Memory in Older Adults: Where We Are Now and What Is Next. *Gerontology*. Epub ahead of print.

Murray, A. D., McNeil, C., Salarirad, S., Deary, I., **Phillips**, L. H., Whalley, L. J., & Staff, R. (2016). Brain hyperintensity location determines outcome in the triad of impaired cognition, physical health and depressive symptoms: A cohort study in late life. *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, *63*, 49-54. DOI: 10.1016/j.archger.2015.10.004

**Pilz**, K. S., Kunchulia, M., Parkosadze, K., & Herzog, M. H. (2016). Spatial and temporal aspects of visual backward masking in children

and young adolescents. *Attention, Perception & Psychophysics*. Epub ahead of print.

**Ross**, A. I., Schenk, T., & **Hesse**, C. (2015). The effect of gaze position on reaching movements in an obstacle avoidance task. *PLoS ONE*, *10* (12), e0144193.

**Schnitzspahn**, K. M. & **Philips**, L. H. (2016). Emotion–cognition interactions. In N. A. Pachana (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Geropsychology*. Singapore: Springer. Epub ahead of print.

**Spotorno**, S., Masson, G. S., & Montagnini, A. (2016). Fixational saccades during grating detection and discrimination. *Vision research*, *118*, 105-118.

**Stanciu**, I., Biehl, S. C., & **Hesse**, C. (in press). Increased cognitive demands boost the spatial interference effect in bimanual pointing. *Psychological Research*.

**Swainson**, R., **Martin**, D., & **Prosser**, L. (in press). Task-switch costs subsequent to cue-only trials. *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*.

**Tatler**, B. W., Macdonald, R. G., Hamling, T., & Richardson, C. (2016). Looking at Domestic Textiles: An Eye-Tracking Experiment Analysing Influences on Viewing Behaviour at Owlpen Manor. *Textile History*, *47*(1), 94-118.

## VACATION SCHOLARSHIPS

Beate Domzalska (Developing Scientists Internship)

Reece McCann (School of Psychology Summer Internship)

Abby McPhail (Developing Scientists Internship)

Nicolas Paul (School of Psychology Summer Internship)

Zsofia Stefan (Discovering Research Psychology Scholarship)

Pauliina Vanni (School of Psychology Summer Internship)

## RESEARCH FUNDING

Antonov, P. (2016-2019). The interplay between enhancement and suppression mechanisms in feature-based attentional selection. ESRC Studentship (1+3). Supervision: Søren K. **Andersen**, Ramakrishna **Chakravarthi**

Gheorghiu, E., & **Martinovic**, J. (2016-2018). £130,595. Elucidating the role of colour in shape processing in human vision. Leverhume Trust research project grant.

**Gomillion**, S. (PI) & **Stainer**, M. (named collaborator) (June 2016-December 2016). \$1495. Online Dating Decisions: An Eye-Tracking Study. Society for Personality and Social Psychology.

**Irwin**, **Nordmann**, & Perkins (2016). Mind the Gap: An investigation into factors influencing student, academic and employer expectations and perceptions of graduate attributes. ESRC / SDS PhD studentship.

## KEEPING UP WITH THE NEWS

For more information about what we are up to in the School please visit our website, follow us on Twitter, or get in touch with us via e-mail or phone.

This newsletter was created by the Psychology Communications Team: Ben Tatler, Katharina Schnitzspahn, Rama Chakravarthi, Lynden Miles, Emily Nordmann and Rhona Moore



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