It’s a great time to be a Kent Psychologist! The School of Psychology has recently welcomed new staff, new students and also returning students.

Let us begin by introducing some new lecturers:

Dr Lydia Kearney is a cognitive psychologist, and so far her research has mainly focused on social anxiety. Lydia completed her MSc and PhD at Kingston University, conducting a series to studies investigating the ways people think about social interactions, and how this can influence their performance.

Within this, she has a particular interest in the images people generate of social events, and the implications arising from the perspective used in such images. Largely, she has investigated the outcomes of people taking an observer perspective on their own social performance, and ways in which the associated images reflect biases of attention and interpretation.

Lydia’s research has also included the links between imagery and rumination, and between imagery and emotion. She is also interested in investigating cognitive and behavioural precursors of depression and anxiety.

Her other interests mainly centre around abnormal psychology, and the ways in which abnormality is defined, classified, and treated.

Dr Christos Pliatsikas is a cognitive psychologist and neuroscientist investigating monolingual and bilingual acquisition and processing of grammar. He completed his BSc studies in Psychology at Panton University (Athens, Greece) (2003), followed by an MSc in Clinical Neurosciences at the Institute of Neurology, UCL (2005), and a PhD in Grammatical Processing in Second Language Learners at the Department of Clinical Language Sciences, University of Reading (2010).

He has worked as a Research Fellow at the Department of Psychology, University of Birmingham, and as a Postdoctoral Research Assistant and the MRI Operations Officer at the Centre for Integrative Neuroscience and Neurodynamics (CINN), University of Reading.

Christos has used behaviouralexperimental paradigms, as well as structural and functional MRI, to investigate how morphology and syntax are represented and processed in the brain. This includes questions regarding whether second language learners achieve native-like morphological and syntactic processing, and the crucial factors that determine it. In the same line of research, he has been investigating whether the brain structure, function and connectivity are affected by the experience of learning a second language.

Kat Wilson is a social psychologist researching the reasons for, and consequences of adopting right wing ideologies. She completed her undergraduate and MSc in psychology at the University of Kent, before continuing into a PhD project supervised by Dr Robbie Sutton.

In one line of work she studies the perceived palliative functions of right wing ideologies such as political Conservatism and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO). Specifically, within this research she studies whether these ideologies are associated with happiness, system justifying beliefs, and closed mindedness. Furthermore, the research is aimed to uncover why some individuals chose to adopt left wing ideologies despite recognising the benefits of Conservatism. In addition to these palliative functions of ideology, she is interested in how adopting these ideologies inhibit social unrest in the face of increasing inequality.

In another line of work, she examines how SDO is involved in vicious cycles of conflict escalation, with a particular emphasis on seemingly irrational decision making. Specifically, this research is focussed on the role of SDO in maintaining conflicts where the costs of doing so outweighs and potential economic rewards.

Dr Annemieke Van den Tol received her PhD on a topic that investigates the psychological value and implications of listening to music. Specifically, this PhD project was aimed at investigating the psychological processes that are involved in people’s decisions to engage in listening to self-identifed sad and happy music and on the effects of music listening. As part of a different collaboration, she investigated the effects of listening to music with unfamiliar structure on outgroup derogation. In her research, she focuses on the study of emotions, cognitions, social identity, effects of music listening, decision to listen to music, and music’s role in everyday life and society.

Annemieke’s teaching activities as part of this post are focused on personality and culture and psychology. Before that, she worked as a teaching assistant in the University of Limerick’s departments of Psychology, Sociology, and the Irish World Academy for Music and Dance where she taught a variety of psychology, statistics, and research methods modules. She completed her PhD in Psychology at the Music and Health Research Group of the University of Limerick under the supervision of Professor Jane Edwards.

The School of Psychology was delighted to welcome its new undergraduate and postgraduate students last month.

Welcome Week included various induction sessions, tours of the department and finally a BBQ in Keynes courtyard. See the pictures from the treasure hunt, BBQ and the social for MSc students on page 2.

Welcome Back Talks were also held at the beginning of the year for our Stage 2 and 3 students.

The talks covered course content, assessment, employability skills, experience schemes and the academic and personal development workshops (Tues and Thurs 12-2pm) as well as final year project surgeries.
Welcome Event Photos

Kent Psychology alumnus, Matt Jones, recalls his time as an undergraduate as he celebrates securing an ESRC scholarships for an MSc and PhD at Cardiff University.

Why did you choose to study psychology?
I was working as an IT Manager prior to becoming a student, but my passion was always to help people and work in Psychology. At 25, I felt I was at a great time to return to study, so I completed an Access to HE diploma and was then accepted at Kent to study Psychology with Clinical Psychology.

What did you enjoy in your studies?
I loved most aspects of my degree, but I particularly enjoyed doing my final year research project. I was able to use the eye-tracking technology to investigate face-processing phenomenon in people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. It was a challenge, but I had a fantastic supervisor who gave me loads of support and helped me push myself to achieve more.

What are you doing now?
I am about to start an ESRC funded MSc/PhD programme at Cardiff university. I will be working as part of a team of academics and PhD students using neuroimaging, genetics, biology, and psychology to develop a method for early detection of neurodegenerative disorders (such as Alzheimer’s Disease).

How did you end up in your current role?
One of the lecturers at Kent – Dr Zara Bergstrom – recommended that I apply. The funding was initially just for a PhD so I didn’t have much confidence that I would be accepted, but they were really impressed with the experience I had gained on my final year project, as well as my previous experience, so they offered me a place with a funded MSc so that I would be more prepared. I have Zara to thank for it as I would never have thought to apply if it wasn’t for her!

How has your degree in psychology helped in your work?
It has given me both a solid foundation of knowledge on which to progress and, as mentioned, it has given me fantastic experience which helped me secure my funding. The degree has also provided me with the confidence to continue working in research, something I hadn’t fully considered when I started.

What are your plans/ambitions for the future?
I would like to work at the forefront of interdisciplinary research in brain disorders. My main interest lies in the interaction between psychology, neuroscience and genetics. I believe that investigating things from this interdisciplinary perspective will really drive forward our understanding of how the brain and behaviour are related.

Do you have any advice for students who are about to graduate this year?
I would say to prepare early for what you want to do and think about how you can make yourself a stronger candidate. It can be difficult to get paid positions or funding, so volunteering a few hours a week during your final year can make a huge difference. Furthermore, the deadline for most funded positions is earlier than you might expect; so the quicker you can think about what you want, the more options will be available to you.

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Aida had this to say about the event: ‘This was an inaugural information sharing event held at UKC. We had a great turnout of individuals including academics from across the campus, clinicians and family members. Most of us shared information about our current work and research interests with ASD. Everyone was very positive and keen to use and develop the ARK website further. There were some great ideas and suggestions as how to make it as informative as possible for anyone who accesses it for information. The next step for the ARK team will be to arrange another event inviting individuals with ASD and their family members to come and meet us at UKC’.

Autism Research at Kent (ARK)

ARK (Autism Research at Kent) is a collaboration recently set up by researchers at the School of Psychology and Tizard Centre. Their aim is to develop a single identity for conducting excellent research on autism at the University of Kent. This will be facilitated through the development of a website (see www.autismresearchkent.co.uk), a database of willing participants in the Kent area and beyond (across the spectrum and ages), and a coordinated recruitment and dissemination agenda.

The ARK team held a Networking and Information event on Thursday 19th September, which was a great success.

On the day, the ARK team introduced the new website and database, and invited attendees to become a part of the collaborative venture. Some researchers volunteered to share their experiences in the field, through short presentations on their current/future research interests and plans, and opportunities for funding etc.

This included talks from organisers Aida Malovic (Tizard) and Heather Ferguson (Psychology) along with colleagues in the School of Arts, English Language and Linguistics and the Centre for Health Services Studies. There were also presentations from members of the ASD Team within Kent County Council and also East Kent Hospitals.

University staff and PhD students met with health-related groups with shared interests in Autism Spectrum Disorder research.

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Recent Publications


Kent Psychologists in the Media

Head of School, Professor Joachim Stoeber, was interviewed by BBC Radio Kent last month. The host, Julia George, asked Joachim to comment upon his areas of expertise on perfectionism and motivation and how this can affect some people’s working lives. In his recent research, Joachim suggests that being a perfectionist and highly motivated at work contributes directly to being a workaholic.

Dr David Wilkinson was asked for his expert opinion this month on a local news story which has prompted a reaction from national press and a local MP. When asked how a grandfather could mistakenly take the wrong child from primary school to a GP appointment, David described the condition of developmental prosopagnosia of which some people unknowingly suffer. He also pointed out age-related ocular and neurological causes of recognition failure that may or may not have been at play here.

Congratulations to Giovanni Travaglino who has been awarded £2,000 by the British Psychological Society for a project entitled “Towards an interdisciplinary dialogue in social protest research”. Giovanni conceived, wrote and submitted the proposal with enthusiastic support from his PhD supervisor, Dominic Abrams.

Congratulations to Rachel Calogero who was awarded Fellowship status within the American Psychological Association as well as the Society for the Psychology of Women this summer.

Congratulations to Karen Douglas on being selected to participate in this year’s “Leadership for Areas of Significant Responsibility (LASR)” programme, a university-wide programme to provide management training for future leaders.

Congratulations to George Randsley de Moura and Abigail Player who have been awarded £2,000 by the Higher Education Academy for a project entitled “Flexible Pedagogies”.

Congratulations to Ayse Uskul who has been awarded 4,000 Euros by the European Association of Social Psychology to organise a small meeting titled “Culture and Psychology: Insights from the European Context” to take place in Leuven, Belgium between 5th-7th July 2014.

Congratulations to David Wilkinson who has been awarded £33,800 by Scion Neurostim for a project entitled “Electrophysiological responses to caloric vestibular stimulation”.

Congratulations to David Williams who has been awarded £3,182 by a sub-group of the Faculty Research Committee in support of a project entitled “Metamemory in autism spectrum disorder”.

Congratulations to Zara Bergström who has been awarded a grant of £2,500 by the Experimental Psychology Society for a project entitled “Combining electrical brain stimulation and EEG to investigate memory in old age”.

Congratulations to Professor Dominic Abrams (pictured left, end of front row, right) on being elected as a Fellow of the British Academy. He is one of only 42 new Fellows from 18 different UK universities, each of them a highly distinguished academic, recognised for their outstanding research and work across the humanities and social sciences.
Events for Students

Psychology Pub Quiz
Wednesday 23rd October

Dr Eddie Vasquez and Dr Zara Bergström are hosting the first bi-annual Psychology Pub Quiz for undergraduate students of the School of Psychology next week.

The pub quiz will be held on Wednesday 23rd October from 6-8pm in Keynes Senior Common Room (above Dolce Vita).

This is a wonderful opportunity for you to get to know your lecturers and peers and to also show off your wisdom! We can put you in a team when you arrive or you can come along in a team of four members (maximum).

The School will provide free pizza and some soft drinks though students are welcome to buy drinks from the K-Bar and bring them to the quiz. You can also win prizes!

Tell us that you will be attending by joining the event on the Kent Psychology Facebook page.

Postgraduate information event
Thursday 5th December

Are you interested in postgraduate study? Or just want to find out more about what we offer at Kent?

We are organising an information event for all final year Psychology students to tell you more about what’s on offer, including our Master’s programmes (in Cognitive Neuropsychology, Developmental Psychology, Forensic Psychology, Group Processes, Organisational Psychology (subject to approval), Research Methods, Social & Applied, and MSc by research), applying for a PhD in Psychology, and the great £1,000 fee reduction for current Kent students!

This event will take place on Thursday 5th December from 2.30pm in KLT4. We look forward to seeing you there! Please contact Dr Heather Ferguson (H.Ferguson@kent.ac.uk) if you have any questions.

Otherwise, join the event on the Kent Psychology Facebook page, to let us know that you’ll be there.

Look out for announcements about the Staff-Student Christmas Party coming soon!

Plus don’t forget about the regular Café Psychology events, the Research Seminar Series, and the weekly Academic and Professional Development Workshops.

If you have an idea for an event you would like the School to support, please let us know about it either by using the suggestions box, emailing the School directly or by contacting your student reps.

BPS London and Home Counties Branch Poster Competition

Well done to final year student Natalie Gentry for putting her knowledge and research skills to the test by taking part in this competition. Here’s what she had to say:

Last year I took part in the undergraduate research experience scheme (RES) offered by the department. This scheme is a great opportunity for undergraduate students to get first hand experience by aiding lecturers with their research. I worked with Professor Bob Johnston conducting research on face recognition and composite production. Whilst completing the RES programme, I had the opportunity to participate in the London and Home Counties Branch poster competition. This is a competition organised by the British Psychology Society (BPS) open to second year undergraduate students. Students are asked to produce a poster relating to specified subject using any area of Psychology that is of interest to them, with prizes being presented to the best authors.

The poster subject last year was “Making an Impact – the Role of Psychology in the Current Economic Climate”. In keeping with the theme of my RES work, I decided to do a poster on how Psychology has helped to evolve methods of producing facial composites. Catching offenders efficiently increases the public perception of safety and improves the economic climate by reducing demands on police time and resources. Unfortunately, witnesses rarely know a suspect and describing unfamiliar faces is hard. Therefore, it is important that facial composite systems provide witnesses with the best tools possible in order to help them build an accurate composite.

Any Suggestions?

If you have any comments or suggestions for the staff in the School of Psychology, then you can feed these back to us by using our suggestions box located outside the Psychology Student Office (Keynes M1.13).

Kent Psychologist

The School of Psychology’s Newsletter is for students and staff. We welcome contributions from both staff and students for future issues. If you would like to write an article or have any news you’d like to share, please contact Carly Turnham.

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