

## Pain – the backdrop of our lives

A truly unique conference, which set out to explore alternative ways of communicating, sharing and assessing suffering, was held at University College London. Encountering Pain emerged after a three-year interdisciplinary project at UCL called 'Pain: Speaking the Threshold' which assessed the value of images and image-making processes to the management of chronic pain.

*Ella Rhodes* was there for the first day of the conference, which truly put clinicians, patients and academics on the same level and opened up fascinating discussions. Pain: Speaking the Threshold drew on a previous project Face 2 Face, a collaboration between artist Deborah Padfield and facial pain consultant Professor Joanna Zakrzewska and patients and staff from University College London Hospitals (UCLH). It focused mainly on facial pain but also explored the impact of visual images on medical dialogue in more detail.

During Face 2 Face, sufferers worked with Deborah Padfield to co-create images of pain, which were subsequently piloted by other patients in NHS clinics. The conference was a chance to share the results with patients and clinicians involved in the study, to hear the testimonies firsthand of those who co-created the photo cards, based on their experience of pain, and to bring together high-profile medical professionals, psychologists, a linguist, historian and neurobiologists to speak about pain and the projects alongside poetry, dance and performances.

Professor Zakrzewska (UCLH), a doctor with a specialism in facial pain, explained that pain could often be difficult to express using language alone, and with 14 million people in the UK suffering from chronic pain it was an important area to address. The photo cards created during Face 2 Face feature visual metaphors, such as an electrical wire sparking or a leg with a heavy weight tied to it, giving patients a new way to explain their pain to medical professionals. Zakrzewska explained that the images encourage the exploration of different aspects of pain between patients and the person listening to their story.

Padfield said she was initially encouraged to use art to express her own pain by her GP and subsequently wanted to assess whether this approach could be helpful to other patients. She said, after meeting pain specialists, and in particular talking to her own pain specialist, Dr Charles Pither, then Medical Director of Input Pain Management Unit, St Thomas' Hospital,

she discovered pain's incommunicability was as frustrating for clinicians as it was for patients. Its invisibility and subjectivity make it a difficult thing to capture using objective measures, she added.

In an earlier project, Perceptions of Pain, Padfield collaborated with Pither, where she co-created with patients photos that represented their unique experiences of pain. In 2004 they carried out a feasibility study to see if these images could benefit other patients, and the feedback received encouraged her to look further into the role of images in patient-clinician communication.

This developed during the subsequent collaboration with Zakrzewska, Face 2 Face, which additionally explored patient experiences of facial pain. This kind of pain presents another problem. 'Our faces', Padfield said, 'are often the canvases we use to express pain, but when the face itself is in constant pain these feelings become harder to express in a way which others can read.' One of the strands of this project involved workshops for clinicians and patients to attend together at both UCLH and the National Portrait Gallery to encourage them to share their experiences outside a clinical context.

Padfield worked with facial pain patients to co-create pain photos. A group of these were integrated with a selection of those from Perceptions of Pain, compiled into a pack of 54 laminated cards and tested out in real consultations, which were filmed. Ten different healthcare professionals from the pain management teams at UCLH offered to have their consultations filmed. The clinicians saw two patients each without images and two new patients with images, both groups under the same conditions. The filmed consultations and post-consultation questionnaires made up a unique body of material that was analysed during the recent Pain: Speaking the Threshold project by experts from different disciplines.

Professor Elena Semino, Head of Linguistics at Lancaster University, analysed these consultations and compared those in which the photos were used and those where they weren't. She assessed the kinds of language used in the consultations and whether the photos changed the amount of speech used by doctors compared to patients. She found that patients spoke much more than clinicians in consultations where the photos were used. In these consultations patients also described their



DEBORAH PADFIELD WITH ALISON GLENN FROM THE SERIES FACE2FACE, 2008 – 2013. DIGITAL ARCHIVAL PRINT © DEBORAH PADFIELD

pain in metaphorical terms. Patients using the photos spoke frequently about their sense of self being worn down due to pain and also disclosed emotional narratives and suicidal feelings. Semino said the photos seemed to encourage people to speak in similes, and from that point more information emerged.

Semino concluded that the use of photos allowed a patient to speak about pain differently as well as increasing references to thoughts and feelings, as well as making it more likely for patients to make personal disclosures, such as suicidal thoughts.

Clinical Health Psychologist Dr Amanda C de C Williams (UCL) steered the audience through an analysis of the non-verbal interactions in the filmed consultations. She said pain was an area of particular interest due to the subjective nature of our experience of it; people bring their own individuality and social role to pain whether as a patient or observer. She found little difference between the general ratings, by both clinicians and patients, about the quality of the consultations as whole; overall these were uniformly quite high. It did emerge, however, that the images seemed to impact on the non-verbal behaviour and in particular more on clinician than patient behaviour.

Williams took a sample of one minute out of every five minutes of each consultation, which were rated by two observers for behaviours around rapport, affiliation, dominance and submission. They saw that patients showed roughly the same level of affiliation whether using images or not, while clinicians showed more positive affiliation when using the images. It appeared patient and clinician behaviour was more attuned in the with-image condition.

After a beautiful dance performance by Anusha Subramanyam, based on the patient experiences used in the project, came a fascinating keynote by Professor Rita Charon (founder and Executive Director of the Program in Narrative Medicine at Columbia and Professor of Medicine at CUMC, New York) on narrative medicine and the talk of pain. Charon coined the term 'narrative medicine' pioneering a new field. Facial-pain sufferers Liz Aldous and Ann Eastman also shared their moving experiences of being involved with the Face 2 Face project and creating images of their own pain, which have since been used by other patients.

Professor Christopher Eccleston (University of Bath) opened his keynote speech on embodied experiences by suggesting pain

was a 'fundamental psychological experience', adding: 'You were born in pain, likely you'll die in pain, significant episodes of your life can be in the context of pain. Pain is the backdrop of our lives, but although it's ever-present and we live in a form of collective denial. We try to pretend it doesn't exist.'

He said that many psychologists see the body simply as a taxi for the mind, and in trying to apply psychology to pain many see it through the lens of abnormal psychology. However, Eccleston said, this does not always 'fit' with a person's experience, as those suffering with chronic pain are usually not psychologically disordered in any way.

Eccleston described himself as a 'normal' psychologist, interested in the everyday and usual. He asked whether there was another way to look at pain aside from thinking about mental states or observed behaviour, he said potentially it sits where it can't be pinned down – between mind and action.

Although individual experiences shouldn't be trivialised, Eccleston added, the only time pain can be seen as abnormal is when it doesn't go away. He said what had fascinated him most about patients was that they were successful in many aspects of life but somehow pain would disassemble them. He added: 'The only way we'll understand the experience they have of pain is to apply normal not abnormal psychology.'

He asked how we could build a non-judgemental, enabling psychology around pain. Eccleston said that much psychology suggests that chronic-pain patients are fear-avoidant, but he added: 'Most of the people I have met have courageous engagement, they're not passive at all. I am not denying their suffering, but people are actively fighting for a way out or a solution.'

We should put the body back into psychology, he concluded, and encourage people to have liberating narratives, and provide treatments that allow them to restructure their own experiences. He said: 'We can have a positive psychology that allows us to recognise what pain is about – being active, engaged and searching.'

The second day saw talks from Professor Joanna Bourke, Dr Preeti Doshi, Professor Maria Fitzgerald, and more. For a special issue on pain, find our June 2011 issue in our archive at [www.thepsychologist.bps.org.uk](http://www.thepsychologist.bps.org.uk).

## FUND TO EFFECT SOCIAL CHANGE

The Cabinet Office has launched an £80 million fund to support Social Impact Bonds (SIB) to help transform people's lives.

The Life Chances Fund, launched in July by Minister for Civil Society Rob Wilson, will tackle entrenched social issues, improving people's life chances by looking at local solutions for local problems to bring better life chances to individuals. The fund will also support a new academic centre to understand and measure new approaches for the public sector to commission services.

The fund is structured around six key themes: drug and alcohol dependency; children's services; early years; young people; older people's services;

and healthy lives. Applications for proposals focused on children's services and tackling drug and alcohol dependency are open until 30 September, to be followed by the other themes over the next 12 months.

The Cabinet Office has also partnered with Blavatnik School of Government at Oxford University to launch the Government Outcomes Lab (GO Lab), to establish an independent centre of academic excellence for the commissioning of public services. The GO Lab will deepen understanding of outcomes-based commissioning, including social impact bonds, by researching new ways for the public sector to commission services.

# The past, present and future of cognitive neuroscience

Tess Brown reports from UCL's Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience 20th Anniversary Conference, 'Mind the Brain'

A sold-out crowd of over 300 attendees, made up of academics, students and the general public, made their way into UCL's Jeffery Hall to be a part of 'Mind the Brain'. This conference aimed to celebrate 20 years of groundbreaking research at the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience (ICN), but also to bring the future of cognitive neuroscience to the public by featuring short (15-minute), engaging and accessible talks by all 12 speakers and four panelists.

Host of the conference, Steve Cross, kicked off the day with lighthearted humour, which relieved the nerves of the speakers while exciting the packed crowd for the first block of talks. Cross welcomed the first speaker to deliver the keynote address, Tim Shallice. Shallice, the founder of the Institute of Cognitive

Neuroscience, spoke on the history of the ICN, from its foundation in 1996 to its current research. His talk humbled attendees by allowing them to have a perspective on how far the field of cognitive neuroscience has come in the past 20 years, and how much of an integral role the ICN has had in that development, and will continue to have into the future.

Block 1 continued with talks from prominent researchers at the ICN, Leun Otten, Oliver Robinson and Lucy Foulkes. All three are highly focused on how their research can impact the future of cognitive neuroscience. For example, Leun Otten spoke on the importance of brain states when forming new memories. She used her research to suggest a future in optimising learning and education,

whereby teachers could utilise brain-state detectors, such as a portable EEG like EMOTIV, to analyse when students are at their optimal brain states. Then, teaching can take place in order to maximise efficiency. Otten dazzled the audience by featuring a demonstration of how the EMOTIV technology works, and just how easy it is to implement in an everyday learning environment.

Robinson and Foulkes wrapped up the first block of speakers by discussing the importance of understanding the underlying causes of psychiatric disorders instead of simply treating symptoms. Robinson focused on anxiety, while Foulkes spoke about disorders of social reward, specifically, psychopathy.

The second block of speakers widened the scope, by extending beyond research done at the ICN. Cognitive neuroscience research is prominent all over UCL's campus. In Block 2, Robb Rutledge spoke about his work on happiness. Rutledge said: 'Happiness does not depend on what you have in your life, rather, you are happy when things are going better than you expected.' To illustrate, silver medallists tend to feel less happy than bronze medallists, because the silvers were so close to winner, whereas the third-place winners are just happy to be on the podium! Therefore, Rutledge concluded, happiness and reward are not one in the same.

Other speakers in the second block were Valerie Curran (pictured), who discussed on the medicinal uses for cannabidiol, Camilla Nord and Sarah White. Nord explained the anomaly of antidepressants. Her answer to explain why antidepressants take at least four to eight weeks to change mood is rooted in the idea that antidepressants change negative biases first, as a bottom-up approach. After many negative biases are changed, improvements in mood follow. On the other hand, White gave the audience an insight into autism, and how a novel, augmented-reality, pretend-play game can work as a treatment for autistic spectrum disorder children.



Valerie Curran speaking at 'Mind the Brain'

The third and final block of individual speakers started out with Katerina Fotopoulou who spoke on the social aspects of subjective experience. For example, when a child falls in the park, that child often tends to look around for its parent before it starts to cry. Why is this? Fotopoulou explained that having social confirmation of pain gives this child the 'green light' to start crying. In a way, Fotopoulou said, this is because there is an innate biological need for social interaction. This research sheds light on the difference between subjectivity and individuality of experience, whereas pain is often thought of individualistic, however, this talk provided evidence as to why it is indeed a social experience.

Steve DiCosta, Jo Hale and Bahador Bahrami followed with talks on how sensory cues give a sense of agency, how avatars can help form the future of social mimicry, and the neuroscience of persuading others, respectively.

To conclude the day of talks, a panel discussion featuring Martin Eimer, Nima Khalighinejad, Anna Kuppuswamy and Geraint Rees looked to answer questions on the future of cognitive neuroscience both from the audience and from the live Twitter feed. The questions led to an enlightening conversation, not just with the panellists amongst themselves, but

with the audience and twittersphere as well. All audience members were engaged in a dialogue on topics ranging from neurobunk, ethics, happiness, and Brexit. The unique perspectives of the panellists allowed the audience to gain a holistic understanding of the future of neuroscience.

At the beginning of the panel discussion, each panellist gave a five-minute synopsis of his or her thoughts on the future of cognitive neuroscience. Martin Eimer started by saying, 'One thing that has changed is the way we talk about our mind, mental states and brain states.' He observed that there is now an effortless and natural talk about brain states and functions when interpreting mental states. The way neuroscience has infiltrated everyday language and thought has impacted the fields of economics, law and theology, showing how the brain has become a mainstay in how we think about ourselves.

Next, Nima Khalighinejad suggested that the future of cognitive neuroscience depends on a shift from encoding to decoding. In the years to come, Khalighinejad believes the field of cognitive neuroscience will help us gain a richer understanding of who we are as humans.

Anna Kuppuswamy followed by

foreseeing bridges being built between different neuroscience fields, and how an all-encompassing view will help understand those with disorders of the brain. She used the example of fatigue, which is not well studied in the field of cognitive neuroscience, despite the fact that fatigue is a major symptom in a lot of neurological problems. Interestingly, fatigue falls in neither the sensorimotor camp nor the cognitive camp. It acts as a crossroads for body-brain-mind research. Kuppuswamy concluded by saying, 'My hope is that cognitive neuroscience will help people with conditions, and we can learn more about the brain when studying pathology.'

Lastly, Geraint Rees took the podium to discuss the future of cognitive neuroscience. Rees believes the following three points to be true, 'First, the future is not about me, it is about you. Second, the future is a lot more like the past than you think. And third, cognitive neuroscience is about understanding what people do, in reference to the brain.' By saying this, Rees made the future of cognitive neuroscience a field that is no longer controlled by a small, academic elite, but one that everyone is responsible for.

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## Presidents' Award

An expert on the psychology of political crisis is to receive this year's Presidents' Award for Distinguished Contributions to Psychological Knowledge from the British Psychological Society.

The winner is Alexander Haslam, Professor of Psychology at the University of Exeter and Professor of Psychology and Australian Laureate Fellow in the School of Psychology at the University of Queensland.

Working with Professor Michelle Ryan at Exeter, Professor Haslam developed the concept of the 'glass cliff' – the tendency for women to be promoted to high-level jobs at times of crisis. They found, for

instance, that companies who appointed a woman to their board had experienced consistently poorer performance in the five months preceding the appointment than those who appointed only men.

Professor Haslam is also known for his work with Professor Steve Reicher reinterrogating issues raised by the Stanford Prison Experiment – this was the basis for the groundbreaking BBC documentary *The Experiment* (see [www.bbcprisonstudy.org](http://www.bbcprisonstudy.org)).

The pair also collaborated on the award-winning 2011 book *The New Psychology of Leadership*, which has provided the framework for a new analysis of phenomena as

diverse as the rise of terrorism, the allure of Donald Trump, and Leicester City FC's success ([www.thepsychologist.org.uk/leicesters-lesson-leadership](http://www.thepsychologist.org.uk/leicesters-lesson-leadership)).

Society President Professor Peter Kinderman said: 'Psychology is a fascinating and broad discipline, and Professor Haslam's research is at the cutting edge of some of our most fascinating subjects – the psychological processes operating in groups, political change, and in the sometimes banal psychology of evil. His work is important – and very timely. Given our current turbulent political context, I can think of few occasions when a study of the consequences of prejudice, groupthink, the psychology of crisis and the role of female leaders is more relevant.'

Commenting on the award, Professor Haslam said:

'Receiving this award is a great honour, and I feel humbled to receive it. But it is largely an acknowledgement of the power of great teamwork and a testament to the range of fantastic collaborators that I have worked with over the last 25 years. Their support has made it possible to tilt at some very big windmills, and it has ensured that the research process has always been a lot of fun. However, I am also conscious of the fact that we still have a lot more work to do – and this award provides great motivation to get on with it.'

**I Professor Haslam has been a regular in our pages over the years – search our archive at [www.thepsychologist.org.uk](http://www.thepsychologist.org.uk) for his contributions. In particular, you will find his 2011 interview 'Free from the shackles'.**



## LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT A 'TOUR DE FORCE'

A passionate campaigner for social justice is the 2016 recipient of the British Psychological Society's Research Board Lifetime Achievement Award.

During her successful career Professor Celia Kitzinger (University of York) has made several significant contributions to psychology. Her lengthy campaign to found the BPS Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section (now Psychology of Sexualities Section) laid the foundation within British psychology for the development and legitimation of the field. The publication of her award-winning book *The Social Construction of Lesbianism* (1987) inspired researchers to engage in sexualities research and is highly cited in psychology and social science journals.

Another key contribution is to the field of language and social interaction, in which Professor Kitzinger has conducted research on how social worlds are produced and sustained in everyday interaction. Professor Kitzinger's article 'Doing feminist conversation analysis' has been heavily cited and has had a profound influence in shaping research on gender and language. Her work in this area underpinned a research trend within the psychology of sexualities focusing on the mundane production of heteronormativity and heterosexism. She also contributes to 'pure' conversation analysis and her article [jointly with her wife Sue Wilkinson] 'Surprise as an interactional achievement' won the 2008 BPS Qualitative Methods in Psychology Section Outstanding Research Award.

More recently [jointly with her sister Professor Jenny Kitzinger], Professor Kitzinger has focused her research on catastrophic brain injury, end-of-life decision-making and advance decisions to refuse treatment (see her article with Sue Wilkinson in our December 2015 edition). This includes an online multimedia resource for family members of people in prolonged vegetative and minimally conscious states, which won first prize from the British Medical Association for Patient Information on Ethical Issues – and also first prize in the ESRC Celebrating Impact Awards (2015).



Along with her numerous research interests Professor Kitzinger continues to teach and inspire undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as health and social care professionals working in mental capacity and end-of-life care. She believes in the importance of mentoring postgraduate students and early-career researchers and continues to provide opportunities for scholar-activists wanting to create a more just world.

Daryl O'Connor, Chair of the Society's Research Board said: 'Celia's contribution to British psychology, and psychology internationally, has been extraordinary over a long and sustained period of time. She has been a tour de force in terms of her research, and her campaigning has inspired a generation. She has changed aspects of the British Psychological Society for the better. Without Celia we might never have had the Psychology of Sexualities Section and the many other excellent developments in qualitative methods, sexualities research and, more recently, in family decision-making about patients with traumatic brain injuries.'

## Celebrating impact



The winners of the annual Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Celebrating Impact Prize have been announced and include psychologist Theresa Gannon, (University of Kent). She and her team were awarded a prize of £10,000, for research on deliberate firesetters and a resulting treatment programme, in the Outstanding Impact on Society category.

Professor Gannon spoke to *The Psychologist* about this work and the impact she hopes it will have in many other countries. She and her research team examined whether deliberate firesetters in hospitals and prisons had any distinctive characteristics compared with people who had never set fires – also in prisons and hospitals – to assess whether they required specialist treatment.

She said prior to this work it was assumed firesetters were the same as other offenders with no particularly different psychological characteristics. However she and her team, comprising Dr Caoilte Ó Ciardh, Dr Emma Alleyne, Dr Magali Barnoux and Dr Nichola Tyler, found that, indeed, they are a special population who require a tailored therapeutic approach.

This group, Gannon added, appear to have a much higher interest in very serious fires such as house fires or hotel fires. They also seem to identify much more with fire, for example saying things like 'I'd be no one without fire'. She added: 'They also appear to normalise the misuse of fire and think it's quite usual to have fire accidents in the home. They ruminate more about perceived wrongs committed against them, are provoked more easily and have much lower self-esteem than other offenders.'

From that work, and a review of the existing literature, Gannon and her team developed the first comprehensive theory of how adult deliberate firesetting evolves and developed a pilot manual including a treatment programme

for people who set fires. This treatment uses a CBT approach with psychotherapeutic elements and looks at the psychological characteristics or risk factors for firesetting as mentioned above.

She explained: 'The programme looks at intimacy in relationships and communication style, because the research suggests people who misuse fire aren't very good at communicating their needs or getting them met in a prosocial way. It also looks at thinking styles and self-regulation problems. The most pertinent part of the programme is that we teach people to reflect back on how their firesetting happened, dissect it and build an events-chain of how it happened and then develop a risk-management plan so if anything similar came up in the future they would know how to handle those situations.'

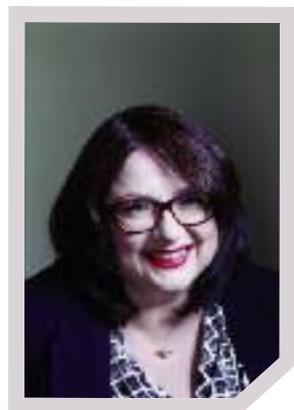
Gannon said she and her colleagues will use the money from the ESRC award to translate the treatment manual into other languages and teach practitioners in other countries how to use it. She has already travelled to America to teach practitioners how to use this treatment programme and will take the same training to Australia and Belgium. She added: 'We're also going to use the impact prize money to perhaps develop online training that can be distributed more widely and we're hoping to translate it into other languages such as Chinese and Japanese.'

Dr Alan Gillespie CBE, Chair of the ESRC said: 'The ESRC focuses on supporting the highest-quality independent research with the power to aid growth, promote innovation and shape society. By encouraging and supporting ESRC-funded researchers to maximise the impact of their work, we ensure that their research has a significant impact across all policy areas and helps make a genuine difference at the local, national and international level.' **ER**

# Four psychologists elected to the British Academy

Perhaps the UK's funniest psychologist, Professor Sophie Scott, was among four academics in the field to be elected to the British Academy this year. The national body for the humanities and social sciences recognised psychologists working in a vast array of areas along with 62 new Fellows.

Scott, Deputy Director of the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience (UCL), well-known for her research and subsequent TED talk on laughter, said she was genuinely surprised to be nominated as a Fellow. She told us: 'I'm very interested to explore the networking possibilities the Academy will open up, science is always a collaborative process. I was elected into the Academy of Medical Sciences a few years ago and it's an interesting process that opens up lots of conversations.'



She said throughout her career she has seen those in the discipline progressing from fellowships in the British Academy and on to fellowships in the Royal Society, including Uta Frith. She added: 'It sends an important signal that people care about the area you're working in and that you're part of a bigger endeavour. It's exciting to be part of that process.'

Many of these academics, Scott said, had helped her throughout her own academic career: 'I've benefited from people who have been part of these associations, some really use it as leverage to encourage and help other people. Climbing that ladder of progress in academia can be very difficult, and you'll hear descriptions of it that can make it feel like people are stepping on your fingers. But there are people on higher rungs who are looking to give young academics a lift up.'

In the future, Scott said, she hopes to continue her work combining two key areas of neuroscience. She added: 'I'm really interested in how we can better understand the way communication systems fit within social neuroscience and interactions, because speech and language are our main way of interacting socially, but if you look at social neuroscience journals you won't see much about it, the two things are kept quite separate. I've been trying to do this for a few years now, but I think we're getting better.'

Professor Nilli Lavie (UCL Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience), who developed the perceptual load theory and continues to study the brain's capacity and the role of attention in information processing, said she was delighted and honoured to be elected as a Fellow. She added: 'I'm looking forward to the opportunities this fellowship will give me to communicate, interact, and network with other public intellectuals and have the chance to influence policy.'



Lavie said she hopes to continue to highlight the implications of human brain capacity limits to a wide array of areas, such

as technology, health and quality of life. She added: 'This is a natural progression from my load theory, which I've worked on over the years, and in the future I hope to drive the important impact this scientific knowledge has for other areas. But at the same time I'd like to think I can be creative and inventive and can't predict what other future directions I might start on!'

Peter Cooper has worked in a number of areas in the general field of psychopathology, including eating disorders, anxiety and depression. A major focus has been the impact of adversity on child development, especially maternal psychopathology, where he has been concerned to develop and evaluate interventions to disrupt intergenerational transmission of disturbance.



In recent years he has been working in Africa where he and his colleague, Lynne Murray, have developed a promising intervention for improving child cognitive and socio-emotional development. Professor Cooper said: 'While I am truly delighted by this award, anyone who knows me knows that all the work I have ever done has been a collective effort which, in a just world, would carry collective reward.'

Professor Martin Eimer, Director of the Brain and Behaviour Lab at the Department for Psychological Sciences at Birkbeck, investigates the cognitive and neural mechanisms of visual attention and working memory, and studies face perception and recognition and their impairment in prosopagnosia. He was also responsible for organising the last three research assessment exercises, RAE and REF, for the department and has also served on Birkbeck's steering groups for the RAE 2008 and REF 2014.

He said: 'This is a great honour not just for myself, but also another acknowledgement of the research excellence of the Department of Psychological Sciences at Birkbeck, which was ranked among the top five UK Psychology and Neuroscience departments in the REF. My team and I could not have conducted our work without the fantastic research infrastructure provided by the department and the college, and without the help and support of our excellent colleagues.' ER



# On the front line of boardroom change

FTSE 100 companies, particularly at executive and governance level, are notoriously white, male domains. But psychologists have become an integral part of actively challenging this status quo, working at senior government levels.

Two psychologists in particular have been involved with shaping the ways FTSE governance boards can become more diverse, in both ethnicity and gender. Dr Doyin Atewologun (Queen Mary, University of London) has been involved with the Parker Review, which is exploring ethnic diversity on boards and gathering information on where some of the country's largest companies stand on diversity.

Her PhD focused on the leadership identities of black and Asian men and women in senior management positions. As a result her former PhD supervisor Susan Vinnicombe, Director of the International Centre for Women Leaders, recommended her to be part of the government review and Atewologun is now Research Lead on it.

Atewologun's research has developed an index of black and minority ethnic people on FTSE 100 boards and compared this with gender trends for boards. She told *The Psychologist*: 'I'm now looking for a way to capture the lived experience of directors, whether this be their career journeys or their specific experiences of

the selection and board appointment process.' The whole report should be released later this year.

Psychology has been central to such research, Atewologun notes, and to the potential strategies that will eventually be used to encourage chairpersons to diversify their boards. 'There's really significant and untapped potential in psychology. If we look at board-level dynamics, or any dynamic between groups, psychology has so much to say around decision-making, biases and assumptions. It can contribute so much to sense-making around data and communication, and how we deal with perceived differences, social and cognitive.'



## 5 minutes with...

Marc Chevreau

An educational psychologist from Blackpool is part of a team leading a strand of a £10 million programme to help encourage resilience and wellbeing in young people. The Big Lottery Fund programme, HeadStart, is going into its third phase following trials and piloting studies; local

authorities in Cornwall, Hull, Kent Newham and Wolverhampton have also been funded for this third phase.

Specialist Senior Educational Psychologist and BPS member Marc Chevreau spoke to Ella Rhodes about his part of the innovative programme, which aims to help 10- to 16-year-olds in the area. It encompasses 17 strands including assistance for looked-after and vulnerable children.

Chevreau has been involved with Headstart, on a secondment from his work with Blackpool Council, since 2014 and has been piloting and developing materials to be used in a whole-school approach.

### Can you tell me about your involvement with HeadStart?

The programme I've been working on is about the universal building of resilience, we have a whole-school programme and the aim of the programme is to work with schools and individual teachers to build an understanding of how the resilience model works. The core of this is something called a 'resilience conversation', and that involves facilitating a school working party, that would have a range of different perspectives on what life in school is like, and that working party would work through a series of statements that we've pulled together out of the research on school resilience so it becomes a self-audit tool.

### How will this work in practice?

I'm contacting schools to create these working parties with them, and they're booking in a term's-worth of fortnightly meetings of this working party. The school will decide who will be involved. You might have a Key Stage 1 and 2 teacher, a teaching assistant,

someone on a support team, to get a wide range of perspectives, but the work will be led by the head teacher. They will start their resilience conversation facilitated by me and by the eight or ninth week may have 10 or so areas of development and we prioritise them and develop an action plan based on those. One of my roles is to make sure we have good outcome measures to see how well they're progressing and what difference it has made to interactions and relationships in the school.

### How will these goals be filtered through to the children?

It depends on what schools choose, but for example, if a school were concerned about e-safety they might go out and talk to children about how concerned they are about this or might do a survey in school. If they set that as a priority they could put in a programme of e-safety for the school and monitor it through children in the school to see if it's made a difference to their social media lives.

### This sounds like a unique programme.

We've been using resilience, and the academic resilience materials piloted by the University of Brighton through its Social Enterprise Boingboing. They have a programme called Academic Resilience, which includes surveying staff and looking at priorities, but in a different way to the resilience conversation. This is really a typical school improvement programme and we've used that model and applied it to resilient interactions in school.

### What's the experience been like for you?

It's been really exciting. We've just come out of the end of phase 2 and it's a unique experience to have the chance to go really, really deep into the area of resilience. Developing materials and models is something I wouldn't normally be able to do to this extent, for example the resilience conversation is in its seventh incarnation! It's always been an aspiration of educational psychology to do as much whole-school work as they can, and what's been special about this is the chance to spend so much time on it.

In many ways it's more of a psychological issue than anything else,' she said.

Psychology has also given us evidence that diverse boards can be much better boards, Atewologun added: 'Quite a lot of research says that greater diversity, managed and harnessed effectively, results in better-quality decision-making and enhanced innovation.'

Dr Ruth Sealy (City University London) has worked for many years examining and encouraging gender diversity on FTSE boards. Most recently she has been involved with the Davies Review, and subsequent Davies Report, which set a target in 2011 to have 25 per cent female board membership by 2015, as well as giving 10 recommendations of how boards could affect this change.

During this review Sealy examined various aspects of gender diversity on boards, including the appointment process and code of governance. She also worked with the media to encourage a change in discourse around women in these positions: 'They changed the language they used from "Why do we need to do this?" to "How do we do this?,"' she said.

Last year the 25 per cent voluntary government target for boards was exceeded hitting 26 per cent, as an aggregate across the FTSE 100 companies, with a range in female board membership of between 10 and 50 per cent in individual companies. The next target is to increase this to 33 per cent by 2020 in line with an EU Directive, and despite Brexit this target will still stand for the Hampton Alexander Review to tackle this.

However, it is clear that after the closing of the Davies Review in October 2015 progress on the numbers of women on boards has stalled. Sealy said: 'We made progress because numerous stakeholder groups were engaged in the change process. Our latest Female FTSE Report (<http://tinyurl.com/jtezukh>) reveals that if you take your foot off the pedal things slow down, the forces of inertia are great. Unless you consciously and proactively manage increasing diversity, it will not happen.' Sealy said she sees her role as quashing the myths in this area.

Psychology has had a direct impact in the world of FTSE 100 board gender diversity and one of the biggest practical changes, which Sealy has been involved with, is companies having more transparency about their governance. The Financial Reporting Council, thanks to evidence Sealy gained in Australia, now asks members to include the percentage of



'...unless you consciously manage diversity, it will not happen'

men and women across all levels of the company in their annual reports. They also have to have a diversity policy, stating what they as a company are doing to increase diversity year-on-year and report progress; As Sealy said: 'It's not so much a nudge, as a huge shove.'

The recent British Psychological Society response to the non-financial reporting consultation this year made similar representations to the UK government for both gender and ethnicity.

Meanwhile the BPS Board Effectiveness Working Group, chaired by Professor Ros Searle (Coventry University) and Michael Webster, has been actively addressing the psychology of governance, decision-making and board effectiveness. The group is currently developing a report. Searle told *The Psychologist*: 'Trust is critical to governance, but our work shows organisational control and external regulation can support trust, but are only part of the solution. We see trust and active distrust as an increasing problem for complex organisations to manage due to the scrutiny given to the symbolic actions of high-profile people.'

Dr Joanna Wilde (Aston Business School), a senior evidence-based organisational psychologist practitioner and also a member of the working group, said she hoped psychology could firmly position itself within this area to point out and examine psychosocial risks to board effectiveness. The new report will aim to explore these in more depth, and Wilde pointed to two clusters of these risks that

warrant a psychosocial audit, rather like the finance audit already required.

She said: 'The first encompasses psychosocial processes that impact information-processing, for example confirmatory cognitive bias which goes unattended and unmanaged. This can happen throughout the organisation skewing what gets reported upwards and also skewing what the board focuses on.' The second, she added, are factors that impact negatively on employees themselves, for example through clues and signals, such as lack of transparency in board recruitment, overpayment of senior people and in the failure to manage workplace culture, distress and distrust.

Psychologists are already having an impact in this area, identifying barriers to board diversity and generating change through long-term monitoring, but psychological expertise has far more to offer in diagnosing and addressing the relevant individual and group dynamics that generate risk. 'While lawyers such as Chilcott can identify evidence of groupthink, it is psychologists such as Professor Jo Silvester (Cass Business School) that have shown how we actively change composition and competence in government. Far more is now required to enhance the psychosocial dynamics of top teams in organisations,' Wilde said. **ER**  
**I Psychologists who wish to contribute relevant material or evidence for the report should contact Professor Searle ([rosalind.searle@coventry.ac.uk](mailto:rosalind.searle@coventry.ac.uk)) with their suggestions. The deadline for these submissions is Friday 30 September.**