



## Winter 2020 Psychology Alumni Newsletter



### Welcome from the Head of School

Welcome to the Winter edition of the School of Psychology alumni newsletter.

This academic year has seen the arrival of many new students to the School, as we expanded our intake of undergraduate students and successfully launched two new MSc courses, one on Applied Developmental Psychology and one on Clinical Health Psychology.

Due to the pandemic, teaching has been largely online this semester, and our students have shown great resilience in coping with learning in a virtual environment. Staff in the School have worked hard to try to ensure that online delivery has gone smoothly, but are very much looking forward to when we can safely be back teaching and meeting students in the David Keir Building again.

The pandemic itself has helped make it clear how important our discipline of Psychology is to society in general.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter.

Best wishes

[Professor Teresa McCormack](#)

Head of School, Psychology



## **Behind the Scenes of the Powerful Channel 4 Series, "The School That Tried to End Racism"**

**By Professor Rhiannon Turner**

### **The research behind the series**

I am a social psychologist, and my main area of research involves developing and evaluating interventions aimed at promoting more positive relations between different groups in society. I have studied these issues in a wide range of contexts, including race relations in the UK, and cross-community relations in Northern Ireland. My research has shown that things like positive, sustained contact experiences, the promotion of empathy, sharing personal experiences, and developing people's confidence in engaging with difficult topics around group identity, prejudice and discrimination, can reduce the biases that we sometimes hold about other groups.

## **Getting involved**

Given my research in this area, I was approached by programme makers commissioned by Channel 4 to work with them to develop a programme of activities aimed at tackling unconscious racial biases and building children's confidence in interacting with people from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Over a period of about 18 months the documentary team, which also included an academic in the field of education and a teacher with expertise in diversity and inclusion, developed a three-week programme of evidence-based activities suitable for an ethnically diverse class of 11-year-old pupils at a school in South London.

## **Filming**

Filming took place in March and April 2020, and my on-screen role, along with Dr Nicola Rollock from Goldsmiths University, was to comment on the activities as they happened, watching them on a screen from a nearby room. We also did 'pieces to camera' where we talked about the evidence on which activities were based, and what we expected to find.

When observing with Nicola, I quickly forgot the cameras were there, and really enjoyed watching and commenting as the children – a really bright, engaging bunch – responded to the activities. It was a joy to watch their journey as they developed a greater understanding of, and empathy around, issues of identity and institutional racism and formed closer bonds with one another as a result. Most importantly, they showed an overall reduction in unconscious racial bias compared to the start of the programme. They came so far in such a short time, and it really gave me a sense of optimism, that if such programmes were more widely available in schools, real change in how we think about race would be possible – after all, it is children like these who will be our future leaders, making decisions that shape society. However, I found doing 'pieces to camera' on my own much more challenging, regularly freezing under pressure – put it this way, the poor directors had to do a lot of takes! It was a steep learning curve, but I did feel I was starting to get the hang of it towards the end of filming.

## **Screening**

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, release of the documentary was delayed – the news was understandably focused on other things. However, following the death of George Floyd, and global action by the 'Black Lives Matter' movement, awareness of issues of institutional racism and systematic inequalities became especially salient in spring 2020, and many organisations have pledged to increase their efforts to tackle these major societal challenges. The decision was therefore made to air the documentary in June 2020 to show the press, public, and policy makers what kinds of activities might be helpful in creating societal change.

## Response to the series

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the highly charged mood around race, there was an overwhelming response to the documentary. On the morning the first episode aired, I was [interviewed via Skype](#) from my spare bedroom on ITV's Good Morning Britain by Susanna Reed and Ben Shepard, who questioned on me whether it was a good idea to have children think about these issues. Two of the children and their family members also appeared, emphasizing how beneficial they found the programme. This was possibly one of the most terrifying experiences of my life so far, but also rather exhilarating. I was also [interviewed for a feature in The Times Magazine](#), and wrote a Question and Answer piece to help children understand issues around racism for *The Week Junior*. The documentary was discussed in over sixty news articles, and [trended on Twitter](#), with a heated debate about whether the school curriculum should be updated. There were certainly critical comments about the approach – not everyone agrees that children should be focusing on these issues in school – but the majority of people were supportive.

## Continuing the work

As a result of the documentary, I was invited to give evidence to a joint session of the Petitions Committee, Women and Equalities Committees, and Education Committee at the House of Commons in November 2020. The aim of this was to prepare MPs for a parliamentary debate on whether there should be mandatory teaching of BAME history, and whether issues around race and racism should be taught more broadly in UK schools. At this session, I argued the importance of making education on these issues mandatory, so children understand systemic racism and can confidently discuss issues around race and culture from an early age. I believe such changes would be hugely beneficial in working towards a more equal and inclusive society, and I await the government response with interest.

You can catch-up or watch the series again at

<https://www.channel4.com/programmes/the-school-that-tried-to-end-racism>

To find out more about Rhiannon's research click read more below.

Read more



## **Psychology (still) At Work during a Pandemic - Can you help?**

### **The importance of placements**

Preparing our students for life after they graduate - whatever their plan - has always been important for the School and even more so this year. Over the last few years we have made significant changes in how we assist our undergraduate students with this transition including:

- Embedded professional skills courses particularly in the second and final years of the degree
- Psychology specific Careers events (in conjunction with Queen's Careers Service)
- One-to-one sessions with our Careers Consultant
- Mock interview practice with an Occupational Psychologist
- Encouraging our students to volunteer or get involved with Queen's Clubs and Societies to earn their Degree Plus accreditation

To find out more about the Queen's Career Service click read more below.

[Read more](#)

Did you know that the Careers and Employability team offer an enhanced support service to all recent graduates for two years after graduation?

The most important part of these preparations are work placements and we are very pleased to be able to offer two options for our undergraduate students:

- Final year placement which is assessed and unpaid; and this is assessed, i.e. the student receives a mark for their coursework, and
- One year professional placement.

We are very proud of the significant contributions our students make to many community and voluntary organisations through these placements. These are contributions that, due to funding constraints, most likely wouldn't otherwise have been possible.

Our placements are popular with both students and employers and 100% of placement providers would recommend the Psychology placement programme to another employer.

[Watch clips of Psychology students talking about their placement experiences.](#)

### **Placements under COVID**

This year of course brought the challenge of COVID and many placements involved working remotely. However some local schools for example were able to provide a safe, socially distanced experience.

Some placements this year are focusing on COVID, for example one student is working closely with the pastoral care team at Glenlola Collegiate in Bangor assessing the impact of COVID related stress and psychological well-being in a secondary school environment. Another project is with Abbeyfield and Wesley, a provider of a range of housing for older people, assessing the impact of social distancing restrictions on care home residents and their families' well-being.

This year, we were able to increase the numbers of students going on professional year placement to 12 students. Employers included:

- IBM
- NISRA
- Praxis Care
- Harberton Special School
- Tor Bank School
- Brain Injury Matters
- BrainWaveBank

We are delighted that, despite the COVID pandemic, we were able to facilitate these placements during this difficult academic year. We believe the number of

placements is a true reflection of how much our students' contributions to organisations are valued.

We are always looking to expand the range of workplace opportunities available to our students. If you or anyone you know could help us in offering a placement we would be delighted to hear from you. Please contact [patricia.murphy@gub.ac.uk](mailto:patricia.murphy@gub.ac.uk)

To find out more about our placements click read more below.

Read more



## **Innovation in Teaching - Dr Jocelyn Dautel**

### **School Teaching Award Winner 2020**

Each year the School recognises an outstanding example of innovative and creative teaching that promotes and enhances our student experience through its annual Teaching Award.

We're delighted that this year's winner is Dr Jocelyn Dautel, for her innovative work on Open Science and psychology replication studies.

Describing her approach Jocelyn explains:

"Encouraging psychology replication studies arises directly from my teaching philosophy. It is my goal to teach students not what to think, but how to think - a skill that will benefit them far beyond the classroom. To do so, I focus on creating opportunities for critical thinking, experiential learning, and peer collaboration through research, and encourage students to apply their learning to solve problems. Teaching students the importance of replication and open science will help a future generation of scientists address the replication crisis in psychology.

Typically, research projects carried out by students in tutorials within our School involve choosing a research question and designing an original study to test that question. This year, I led tutorial groups in replication studies of cutting-edge experiments. Replications have pedagogical benefits:

- Expert researchers provide a well-designed study.
- The question is current and interesting to students, the instructor, and the scientific community
- The results contribute to the field, allowing students to be an active part of the scientific community (Frank & Saxe, 2012).

Moreover, replication studies are a natural avenue for critical evaluation because students must identify why the study is in need of replication by evaluating strengths and limitations of the study method, sample, or design. Then, after carrying out a replication study, students can compare and contrast their method, analysis, and interpretation of the findings with the original publication.

I engaged students in the Open Science Framework (OSF) Collaborative Replications and Education Project (CREP). This is a fantastic pedagogical tool, identifying top-cited empirical papers with surprising findings or small samples and providing original resources for replications. The project also provides the opportunity to contribute the findings for collaborative publication.

To find out more about the Collaborative Replications and Education Project (CREP) click read more below.

[Read more](#)

Students learned the experimental design and methodological and statistical reasons for replication. Overall, students were able to learn and adapt a study designed by an expert in the field investigating a relevant and interesting topic. I believe this increased students' confidence to engage with a scientific community, both through CREP, and local conferences and publications. This is demonstrated by one student whose poster presentation of her group's project was accepted at



the Northern Ireland British Psychological Society conference. Two students and I are also currently writing up their findings for publication. It is quite rare for tutorial group projects to be disseminated; teaching replication can have real benefits for students joining the local and broader scientific community.”

### **Reaction to the award**

Jocelyn said of the Award:

"I am delighted to receive this award that recognises innovation in teaching and student research supervision. Involving students in psychology replication studies ensures student research projects are current and interesting to students, the instructor, and the scientific community".

### **Future work**

The Award consists of a £2,000 grant which Jocelyn will use for research aimed at continuing to develop and promote research-led teaching practices in the School.

We congratulate Jocelyn on her well-deserved award and wish her continued success.

To find out more about Jocelyn and her work click read more below.

[Read more](#)



## **Mental Health Scoop - A New Student Podcast**

**By Niamh McMullan, BSc Psychology student**

The Mental Health Scoop is a podcast that I set up through Queen's Radio station. I joined Queen's Radio during lockdown and became a member of the news team 'The Sunday Scoop'. I was delighted with this opportunity as the broadcasting industry was always something that interested me. I began by preparing 5 minute segments for 'The Sunday Scoop' containing news and advice in relation to Mental Health, but the Head of News at the station felt that I could potentially use my knowledge of Psychology and love for the industry to make my own podcast.

I would like to call myself an advocate of mental health because I believe there is so much more that could be done to cut the stigma of the topic, normalise it in conversation and raise awareness for the many different issues, such as anxiety, self-esteem, suicide and so on.

Every week is based on a different topic. I invite guests to speak on their experience of the issue along with another guest who specialises in, or has focused knowledge on, this topic.

In the first episode, I began with the topic anxiety in student life, with specific reference to Coronavirus. Alannah Hagan, my first guest, discussed how isolation increased her anxiety as a student in Queen's and how she managed her previous history of mental health issues. The Head of Welfare at Queen's, Katie Ní Chléire,

also discussed what welfare and support services are available to students and those in need.

In the second episode, we focused on more positive aspects of mental health and discussed motivation, stress-busting and optimism while learning online and working from home. One of my guests that week was Dr Chris Gibbons, Lecturer (Education) in the School of Psychology, who is an expert on stress.

The third episode focused on a key and important topic, Suicide Prevention. I spoke to Professor Siobhan O'Neill, the Northern Ireland Mental Health Champion, who has conducted an array of research particularly in relation to suicide and depression in students, as well as a suicide survivor to discuss his experience.

The podcast is broadcast on Spotify, and Apple podcasts every Friday at 10am so is available to anyone who can use these! It was initially targeted at students, but now with a broad audience listening I try to engage and relate to a range of ages.

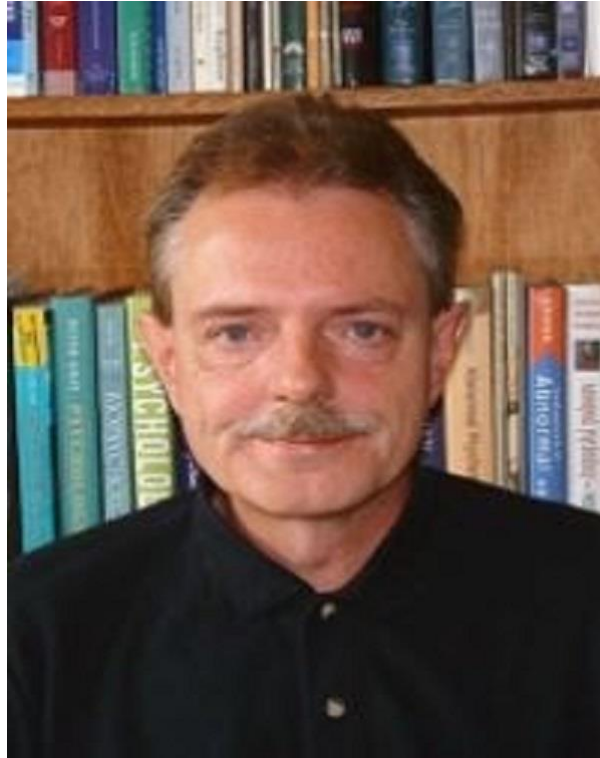
Hopefully you get the chance to listen, enjoy and find some advice or relevant information you can apply to yourself to improve your well-being.

You can find the Mental Health Scoop podcast on Spotify at the links below:

[Listen to episode 1](#)

[Listen to episode 2](#)

[Listen to episode 3](#)



## **Looking Back - Reflections on a Career in the School of Psychology**

**By Dr Rob Bell, Honorary Lecturer**

### **Early interest in Psychology**

My interest in Psychology was triggered by an A-level Biology project that examined rodent learning in a maze test. The results sparked an interest in the relationship between brain and behaviour that led me to apply to QUB Psychology and enter the School (then Department) in 1970. Intellectually stimulating lectures by John Cowley, Steve Cooper and Ken Brown strongly encouraged my interest in brain - behaviour relationships, particularly the role of neurotransmitters in aggressive behaviour.

### **Life as a student in Belfast during the Troubles**

The early seventies in Northern Ireland witnessed a very violent era of political unrest, now referred to as "The Troubles". I vividly recall, with many fellow students of that time, the dreadful sense of uncertainty when we started to revise for our final examinations. Indeed, the nadir at this time was the onset of the Ulster Workers Council strike in 1974 that resulted in electricity cuts and food shortages. Reading by candlelight was very tedious! Fortunately, with much support from Psychology staff, we managed to graduate successfully.

## **Embarking on an academic career**

Following completion of my PhD, supervised by Ken Brown, I completed a short sojourn teaching at UUU and returned to a lectureship in QUB Psychology in 1980. I developed my research to focus on the behavioural pharmacology of linked aspects of animal and human behaviour.

## **Overview of my research**

In collaboration with colleagues in QUB and elsewhere, I established the following paradigms:

### *Aggressive behaviour in mice*

Our investigations concerning the neurotransmitter serotonin (5-HT) have delineated a role for the sub-receptors 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> and 5-HT<sub>1B</sub> in the control of murine aggressive behaviour. These results suggested the important potential of 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> agents for the control of anxiety and aggressive behaviour. From this view point, I examined, in collaboration with Dr Paul Mitchell (Dept. Pharmacy and Pharmacology, University of Bath), the influences of new 5-HT agents in the control of animal and human aggression.

### *Closed Head Injuries and Aggressive Behaviour*

This work, performed in collaboration with Dr Robert Rauch, School of Psychology, QUB and Kevin Dyer, PhD student, was designed to determine why patients who have suffered some form of closed head injury often display aggressive behaviour. The background to this research lies in the relationships between specific brain areas and behaviour.

### *Psychosis - Latent Inhibition (LI) in rats and LI in schizophrenic patients / healthy volunteers*

A constructive approach to investigating the biological basis of schizophrenia has been to use information processing models of the disease to link psychotic phenomena to their neural basis. Schizophrenic patients are impaired in a number of experimental cognitive tasks that support this approach, including models of selective attention such as latent inhibition (LI).

LI refers to a process in which noncontingent presentation of a stimulus attenuates its ability to enter into subsequent associations. The development of a rodent LI paradigm was performed in collaboration with Professor David King, Department of Therapeutics and Pharmacology, QUB and two graduated PhD students Karen Trimble and David Gracey. The purpose of this research was to use the model of latent inhibition in the rat to assess the potential clinical efficacy of new compounds developed to treat schizophrenia. Professor King and I also developed a human paradigm to evaluate LI in schizophrenic patients and healthy volunteers. This paradigm was used in conjunction with other psychological (CANTAB software) and physiological (eye movement) tests to assess the onset/treatment of schizophrenia.

## Reflections

Looking back on my career in Psychology, I certainly found my research and teaching to be fulfilling for myself and I hope my students. During my years as Associate Dean in the Faculty of Science, I met many colleagues in other departments in the University. I was sometimes left with the impression that the teaching and research performed by the Department of Psychology was not fully understood and appreciated for attracting many students to the Faculty. Since my retirement, however, I have been very pleased to watch the School of Psychology grow from strength to strength.

## Calling Recent Graduates

Remember, the Careers Service offers an enhanced service to graduates for up to two years after graduation. To find out more about the service click read more below

Read more

## GRADUATE NEWS

### Our alumni

You are part of a 200,000-strong family of Queen's alumni around the world, 6,000 of whom studied Psychology!

We would love to be able to share stories of your success with your fellow alumni.

To keep up-to-date with alumni services and news, please check your details with us at: <https://daro.qub.ac.uk/UserLogin>

And if you'd like to be featured in our next **Psychology Alumni Newsletter** (spring 2021) or have news to share about your international experience, please contact Patricia Murphy within our School ([patricia.murphy@qub.ac.uk](mailto:patricia.murphy@qub.ac.uk)).



### Stay in touch

Connect with former classmates and keep up with what's happening at the School of Psychology via social media.

Like us on [Facebook](#), follow us on [Twitter](#), develop your professional networks via [LinkedIn](#) and check out our [website](#).

**Issued by the Development and Alumni Relations Office on behalf of the School of Psychology.**

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