

# Psychology News

**Summer 2020**



## Welcome to the School of Psychology Newsletter, 2020

The School of Psychology staff and students are proud to have accomplished several milestones before the highly uncertain and challenging situation arose with Covid-19. The advent of the virus and the concomitant measures that have been put in place to mitigate its effect have changed the way the students, the staff and the entire University has operated its second term. However, the members of the University have faced up to this adversity with remarkable gumption. A few highlights of these changes are that the entire exam schedule was conducted online with nary a hitch; similarly, a substantial portion of the courses, data analysis and theses writing that were meant to be undertaken in the second half of the semester was conducted off-campus and online. It is gratifying to see all stakeholders rising up to the challenge. We are confident that the same spirit will guide us over the continuing obstacle that the virus poses. The challenge nonetheless allows us an opportunity to innovate and improve our teaching delivery and research activities, which we hope to implement over the next few months.

Having said that, I want to use this newsletter to highlight the accomplishments of our community. The School held a highly successful networking event in January that brought together students and potential employers (p. 2). We will then hear from alumni who are continuing to participate in University and School events and enriching the environment (p. 4). We also present a grateful note acknowledging the immensely important contributions by our alumni towards helping vulnerable members of the community during these difficult times (p. 5). We then introduce six new faculty members who joined us this year (p. 6). We then feature a profile of a PhD student, Vanessa Wong, and her research on the important ability of Prospective Memory (p. 8). Psychology has been at the forefront of innovation, which is showcased by two recently developed online programmes (p. xx). We are planning to introduce further such programmes that people can combine to obtain advanced education degrees. We believe this approach forms an important part of the future of higher education. Finally, we end with the success achieved by our faculty members in the form of two research grants (p. 10-11).

I congratulate all the students who have successfully navigated these trying times and are set to graduate and also the rest of the community for showing the resolve to face the current challenge. I look forward to a brighter future for the students and the school.

**Dr Rama Chakravarthi**, Director of Communications.

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# School of Psychology Networking Event, January 2020

This year marks the fifth anniversary of the annual Psychology networking event! The aim of this event is to bring together a range of professionals, employers, volunteer organisations with our students to facilitate career planning, employability and networking. This year a wide range of Psychology professionals (including clinical, health, educational and academic psychologists), industrial organisations (including People Factor Consultants and the Oil and Gas Technology Centre), charities (including Childline, Penumbra and Absafe) attended along with 300 students, both undergraduate and postgraduate. These professionals have kindly taken time out from their busy schedules to come along, meet our students and inspire the next generation.



The networking event is part of the School of Psychology employability program, which spans all four years of the degree, encompassing workshops, career talks, internships and culminating in the networking session. The aim was to support students in finding out more about possible career avenues, along with networking and chatting with a variety of individuals, some of whom might sit on future postgraduate application panels, or interview boards (always nice to spot a familiar face in those situations!). Feedback from the event indicated that both students and professionals enjoyed themselves, with several students commenting that they felt they were now much better informed about what they could do after graduation. We would like to thank everyone who attended and look forward to seeing many of you again next year. We asked the employers a few questions to inquire about their experience of the event, our students and our University.



## EMPLOYER TESTIMONIAL

### ***What do you think about University of Aberdeen students?***

The students are always enthusiastic, well prepared for the event and have done their research beforehand. They know what questions to ask and are eager to gain an insight into the career path.

### ***What career/work experience/volunteer opportunities are available to students in your organisation?***

Students should gain a breadth and balance of work experience in the areas of education, social care and health fields to aid their progression into the profession. Due to data protection we can't offer volunteer work or shadowing, however, we are always delighted to meet people interested in this career.

### ***How useful do you find this event?***

We want this event to be a springboard for students to learn about educational psychology, see our passion and hear about the variety of tasks we carry out in our work. We hope this event encourages students to consider educational psychology as a career for them!



**Melissa Whiston, Educational Psychologist, Aberdeen City Council**

## EMPLOYER TESTIMONIAL

### ***What do you think about University of Aberdeen students?***

The Psychology Students of Aberdeen University always seem willing to engage and participate in these networking events. It is encouraging to see so many students showing an active interest in opportunities beyond their undergraduate experience.

### ***What career/work experience/volunteer opportunities are available to students in your organisation?***

We have hosted internships and we have opportunities for volunteering to help provide interim support for our service users.

### ***How useful do you find this event?***

My experience of the networking event has always been positive with plenty of interaction and relevant enquiries. It is a great opportunity to connect with the department and their students.



**Claire Moggach, Cairns counselling**

## EMPLOYER TESTIMONIAL

### ***What do you think about University of Aberdeen students?***

Always engaging, with good questions and keen to know what they can do. The university students we already have in our organisation are a great asset.

### ***What career/work experience/volunteer opportunities are available to students in your organisation?***

We have volunteering opportunities with our helpline, training is provided to become a Childline Counsellor, Email counsellor or Switchboarder. The staff team at Childline includes supervisors who were previously volunteers.

### ***How useful do you find this event?***

This event is in our yearly calendar and we wouldn't miss it, always well attended. It is great to talk with students of any background and those specifically who are on a career path that our volunteering opportunities will support. The psychology students bring much in the way of skills that we are looking for at Childline and we enjoy working with them in developing these skills and progressing through their studies.



**Kerri Stewart, Childline**

## STUDENT TESTIMONIAL

As part of my in-term internship, where I investigated Self-bias in Social context under the supervision of Dr Mingyuan Chu, I had the opportunity to get first-hand experience in laboratory experiments using qualitative research methods. It involved running an experiment on the computer and making sure that the participants understood what was asked of them. This experience helped me become more organised and develop many skills, such as effective interpersonal communication. This internship improved my time-management skills, not only because everything had to be prepared before the participants arrived, but also because there were trials where more than one participant was needed and I had to make sure that the first participant has completed certain tasks in time for the second participant to start. It made me realise how important it is to pay attention to all relevant details such as ensuring that the participants' instructions matched the experiment's trials and how to correctly save the results. This offered me the possibility to put into practice what I have learnt during the research methods courses. Being interested in the occupational branch of psychology, it is of great interest to me to ensure I understand how to manage different people and situations. This internship taught me why teamwork is important and how different people coming from diverse backgrounds can provide insights into solving a potential problem. I had the chance to meet many people that I would have otherwise never met, thus extending my networking circle. Furthermore, it has shown me what I should expect for the process of gathering data for my fourth-year project, which reduced my anxiety.



**Alexandra Popescu**

## STUDENT TESTIMONIAL

Working in the Customer Insight and User Research Team within the Customer Directorate of HM Courts and Tribunals Service, my summer internship involved collating social research such as newly released statistics and academic literature. Moreover, I had the opportunity to conduct user research both on the field and in the labs using qualitative research methods to improve Government Digital Services. Aspiring to pursue a career in research, I sought to learn about how the research skills I had gained through my Psychology degree could be applied to improve services in the public sector, while strengthening my research skillset. Meeting colleagues with diverse backgrounds and qualifications enabled me to broaden my professional network. It also allowed me to gain insights into the range of possible career paths where a Psychology degree could take me while utilising my research skillset to improve organisational services.



**Lucy Truong**

## STUDENT TESTIMONIAL

My work experience consisted of working as a research assistant on a research project in the Education Department. After completing a weeklong course in qualitative research methods, I continued as a research assistant with the lecturer who delivered the course. We conducted a large-scale qualitative research project that critically evaluates the use of school uniforms in Scotland. In this project, I learned how to use the data coding software NVivo to code large amounts of policy documents. I was subsequently given the opportunity to formulate my own research question based on the dataset and I am now finishing up an article with the lead researcher based on our findings. Working on a research project from start to finish has been incredibly educational, as I have been involved in all aspects of the research process, from data collection to writing up the findings. My work experience has also been a great opportunity to explore other fields, specifically sociology of education, and to learn from and draw on sociological theory in analysing data. The theoretical knowledge I gained as well as the skills in qualitative research I developed were very helpful for my thesis project, as I

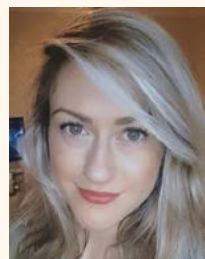


conducted a qualitative thesis using NVivo as a coding tool. This experience reinforced my wish to pursue interdisciplinary studies and subsequently a career in research.

**Annabelle Olsson**



# Hearing From Our Alumni



I was fascinated with human behaviour and felt that psychology would enable me to learn more about this whilst also providing me with a degree that is relevant to everyone and every workplace in some way, shape or form.

During my time at University I was able to meet like-minded people and make new friends, not just from psychology but from other courses too. I enjoyed creating a balance between social and academic aspects of the student experience. I also enjoyed the personal development aspect and I was given numerous opportunities to further this during my time at University, for example, by chairing debate classes and attending a forensic analytic psychology conference in London.

After graduating, I began as a Support Worker, working with autistic adults who also presented a number of mental health difficulties. I supported them with their daily life and attended meetings where I offered my thoughts regarding their care package and how it might be modified to best meet the needs of the adults I worked with.

Following this, I began a role as a Residential Practitioner working with young people aged 12-21 who have experienced significant childhood trauma. I've always been passionate about caring for others and this role enabled me to find a job that better utilised my degree and associated skills. My knowledge of child development theories, an understanding of how trauma can affect the brain and an ability to empathise and remain curious about the reasons behind behaviour have all been directly relevant.

I'm still involved with the University at the moment as I also work for a company called Scholars Mentoring Company. In this role I mentor students from local colleges and Universities in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance funding in order to help them tackle any educational barriers they feel their disability creates. I also volunteer as a Support Worker at Rape Crisis Grampian and I again feel my Psychology degree has equipped me with lots of transferable skills in relation to this such as active listening and curiosity regarding the reasons behind feelings and behaviours.

I would encourage graduates to take advantage of all and any opportunities that you are presented with and to not be disappointed if things don't work out at first. Finding a job you are happy with is a difficult and often lengthy process but try to not lose sight of your goals and aspirations.

*Lisa Kilgour, MA Psychology 2013*



Once I graduated from the University of Aberdeen, I became the President of Societies and Student Activities at the Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) which involved overseeing 140 student societies and organisations at the University of Aberdeen.

After finishing my two years with AUSA I wanted to expand my training in marketing and communications, so I applied for a Master in Communication Management at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, USA. After obtaining my Masters degree, I worked as Student Communications Officer at Swansea University, which eventually lead me to my current job as Chief Marketing Officer at fitness company Flowin in Liverpool.

My degree at Aberdeen, together with the extracurricular activities I was able to partake in there, was essential for me to get to where I am today. I was able to gain a strong degree which prepared me academically to pursue my Masters degree in the United States and graduate with straight As and two distinction awards. My experience with extracurricular activities helped me land my first job as Societies President at AUSA and I am eternally grateful to Aberdeen University and everything I gained there.

To the graduating class of 2020, in these uncertain times things may not have worked out exactly how you expected them to. Your classes may have been disrupted and even your graduation. But even though things are a bit lopsided right now, please rest assured that your education and degree from the University of Aberdeen has prepared you to face the challenges and obstacles that may come your way. The experiences you have had during your time at Aberdeen will remain treasured memories forever and your education will equip you for great opportunities and successes in your future career. Life sometimes presents us with challenges and difficulties, and things may not always turn out the way we thought, but success lies in the way we choose to deal with those challenges. So pick yourself up and hold your heads high. Know that you are brilliant, and brilliant things are waiting for you.

*Emma Van Carlen, MA Psychology, 2012*

## THE COVID-19 525 BURSARY APPEAL

2020 marks the University of Aberdeen's 525th anniversary, one of the most challenging in the University's history. But we want to make our 525th anniversary a positive one by coming together to support students affected by the recent pandemic, and creating the COVID-19 525 Bursary Fund.

Many students are finding it harder than ever to make ends meet as their part-time jobs have disappeared, yet they still have bills and rent to pay.

Those who also rely on their family for support may be gravely affected by loss of family income, including students undertaking important medical research. Many international students find themselves confined to halls and unable to return home to their family. Other students struggle to join online learning due to a lack of equipment or a poor internet connection. And looking forward to the new term, students from disadvantaged backgrounds may be unable to join us without savings from their summer jobs.

We have been overwhelmed by the support shown so far to the Bursary fund, with nearly 600 people raising over £133,000 (this includes a £50,000 legacy donation and fundraising by the Access and Articulation Team who have taken on a 525 mile challenge!). These incredible gifts will help to lessen the impact of the pandemic on our students both now and in the years to come.

### KEEP IN TOUCH

Once you graduate you'll be joining a community of over 100,000 alumni across the world. Stay in touch to find out about local and online events as well as exclusive opportunities, benefits and services that are available to you or continue to support the University as an alumni volunteer. Look out for an email that will be coming to you shortly from the Alumni Relations team to find out how you can remain connected and follow the University of Aberdeen Alumni Relations on Facebook or Twitter to keep updated.

## New Staff Members

This year, we have been lucky to expand our dynamic department with six fantastic faculty members joining us from various parts of the world. Professors Jie Sui and Patric Bach have joined us as newly instituted Chairs. Dr Clare Sutherland has travelled all the way from Australia to start as a Senior Lecturer. Drs Mauro Manassi (from the other end of the world, California), Joost Rommers (Netherlands) and Tobias Katus (London) have started here as Lecturers. We extend them all a warm welcome.

Professor **Jie SUI** received her PhD in cognitive neuroscience from Peking University. Her research has been awarded a number of fellowships from the European Commission and the Royal Society and successive research grants from the ESRC, the Wellcome Trust and the Leverhulme Trust. Jie set up a Social Cognition & Cultural Neuroscience Lab at Oxford where she sought to understand the interactions among the brain, mind and culture. She was a reader of Psychology at Bath from 2016 until she moved to Aberdeen in 2019. Jie is now particularly interested in cognitive approaches including virtual reality technologies to understand the nature of the self and how aberrant self-representation leads to different mental disorders, behavioural changes and cognitive decline in ageing.

Dr **Clare SUTHERLAND** received her PhD from the University of York in 2016. After completing her PhD, she worked at the Australian Centre of Excellence on Cognition and its Disorders, in the University of Western Australia. Clare studies how people form social judgements from faces, such as first impressions. Her research mainly aims to examine the influence of stereotypes and contextual knowledge on these judgements. She is also interested in the idea that different photographs of the same people can give rise to different impressions and in using naturalistic face images.

She is currently employed at the University of Aberdeen as a Senior Lecturer, and teaches social psychology and face perception, and serves as the Exams Officer for postgraduate courses. She is also an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Western Australia.

Outside of her academic life, Clare loves being in the water and especially going snorkelling. She has swum with fish and sharks of all types, but her favourite are the turtles!



Professor **Patric BACH** joined the School of Psychology in April 2020. Patric received his PhD in 2004 at the Max-Planck-Institute for Psychological Research in Munich, Germany. He moved to the UK to join Professor Steven P. Tipper's lab, in Bangor, Wales, and then took up his first

Associate Professor post at the University of Plymouth, Devon. His website is [www.actionprediction.org/](http://www.actionprediction.org/)

Patric uses behavioural and neuroimaging methods to investigate how people plan their own actions and understand those of others. Current projects investigate, for example, how intentional behaviour arises from people's goals and intentions and how hypnosis-like "ideomotor suggestions" can bypass these processes and make people carry out actions they have been asked to withhold. Other projects investigate how the expectations we have about other people change how we "see" their actions (so that a smile looks more smiley, for example, if we know that the person has just received good news), and how perspective taking allows people to put themselves into another person's shoes and (virtually) see through their eyes.

Patric has just been awarded a Leverhulme Trust grant for the project "Social perception as Bayesian hypothesis testing and revision". It uses behavioural and neuroimaging (EEG, fMRI) methods to find out how people understand other people's actions and learn from what they see. The project runs from May 2020 to October 2024. You can read about it at [www.actionprediction.org/bayesian-social-perception](http://www.actionprediction.org/bayesian-social-perception)



Dr **Joost ROOMERS** received his PhD from the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics and worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Illinois and the Donders Institute for Brain, Cognition and Behaviour. His research uses EEG, eye-tracking, and

behavioral experimentation to address questions in language comprehension, production, and memory. For example, Joost is interested in the mechanisms underlying people's ability to predict upcoming input, the relationship between production and comprehension, and how language influences what people ultimately remember.



Dr **Mauro MANASSI** received his PhD in Neuroscience at École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (Switzerland), and worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of California, Berkeley (USA) before joining the School. His research investigates how we perceive a

coherent visual world. Our everyday world is so constantly dynamic and cluttered that the enormous amount of visual information should easily overwhelm our brain's limited capacity. Mauro's research program focuses on two important visual mechanisms that let us perceive a coherent visual world: Organization and Stabilization. He uses behavioural experimentation on normal and special populations to pursue this question.



Dr **Tobias KATUS** joined the School of Psychology in August 2019. His research focuses on the influence of attention on perception and working memory in the sense of touch. Tobi explores selective attention in the somatosensory modality. Since completing his PhD at the University

of Leipzig in 2013, he has continued researching the link between attention and memory. During his years as a research fellow at Birkbeck, University of London, he used the Electroencephalographic technique known as ERPs to measure the attentional activation of memory content in perceptual regions of the brain, namely, somatosensory cortex. Before moving on to a faculty position at the University of Aberdeen, he worked on a 3-year research project funded by the Leverhulme Trust that examined whether or not tactile and visual memories compete for a memory resource that is shared across different modalities.



## A PhD Story: Stress and Prospective Memory

Third year PhD student Yu Ho Vanessa Wong shares with us her research on the influence of stress on peoples' prospective memory.

*"It's your mother's birthday next week and you got her a card. Before you left for work this morning you reminded yourself to put the card in your bag so that you can post it on the way home. On the way home, you had an intense argument with a friend over the phone. It was only by the time you got back home that you realised that you had totally forgotten posting the card."*

The above scenario probably sounds familiar to everyone. It may not be the birthday card in your case but surely, we have all been in situations where failure of our prospective memory (PM) caused us to forget doing something we have planned in mind. PM describes an essential cognitive ability that enables humans to recall and perform postponed intentions at a later time or occasions while being occupied by ongoing activities. A reliable PM functioning is vital for people to carry out planned actions in their daily lives successfully. As a result, the investigation of potential stress effects on PM performance is highly relevant from an applied perspective.

Stress is well documented to have detrimental effects on human cognition. When in a stressful situation, our body produces stress hormones that alter the activity in the brain areas that are associated with cognitive control, including PM. Therefore, it seems reasonable to consider that PM should be impaired by stress. Surprisingly, earlier studies that induced stress in the laboratory did not find any significant impact of stress on PM performance. On the other hand, naturalistic studies that examined the effect of everyday stress on PM found that higher overall everyday stress was related to poorer PM performance. Therefore, my research aims to reconcile these opposing findings by investigating the impact of stress on PM in both laboratory and naturalistic setting.

After reviewing the literature on stress effects on cognitive control, we conducted two studies that used a complex PM paradigm and the

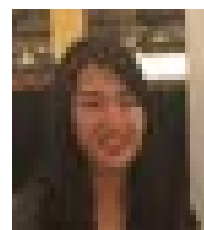


An example of the typical set-up of the TSST.

manipulation of the appraisal of the stress induction to explain the absent stress effects in the lab. A typical stress study involves stress induction and measurement of the stress responses. In both lab studies, we used a commonly used lab stressor, the so-called Trier Social Stress Task (TSST) where participants are asked to give a job interview style speech and complete a mental arithmetic task under evaluation of a live panel of experts. Subjective and physiological stress responses (e.g. heart rate variability) were measured throughout the experiment. Our results suggest that stress impairs PM only when presented as a threat and when the PM paradigm is rather difficult. As for the naturalistic study, we used a longitudinal intensive method asking participants several times a day for 10 consecutive days to report their momentary stress levels and to work on PM tasks using their smart phones. We are currently analysing the data.

My PhD is funded by an Elphinstone scholarship. Last September, I received a Grindley Grant from The Experimental Psychology Society which allowed

me to present my findings at the 21st Conference of the European Society for Cognitive Psychology in Tenerife. This trip offered me an amazing opportunity to communicate my project findings to other researchers in my field. Outside my PhD, I also have a part-time job as a relief support worker at Inspire which is a charity providing support to people with learning disabilities. It is a very rewarding job and provides a nice break from my research.



Yu Ho Vanessa Wong

### FIND OUT MORE:

If you would like to find out more about my research conducted under the supervision of Dr Katharina Schnitzspahn and Professor Louise Phillips, please contact me at [y.wong@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:y.wong@abdn.ac.uk).

## School of Psychology Develops Online Learning Courses

Online learning provides students with the flexibility of learning at their own pace, and from any location in the world. The current pandemic has raised the profile of online learning in the new world of social distancing, but Psychology was already ahead of the curve with two online courses developed over the past 18 months.



The first course, Human Factors in Industrial Practice (<https://on.abdn.ac.uk/courses/human-factors-in-industrial-practice/>) provides an introduction to the study of Human Factors, providing insight into human performance, behaviour, and safety at work. The twelve-week course covers a broad range of topics, from the impact of stress at work to Psychological workplace design principles. Students are encouraged to apply the knowledge gained to their own field of work, and to interact with students from a variety of workplaces and locations via regular online discussion boards.

The second course, Non-Technical Skills in Industry (<https://on.abdn.ac.uk/courses/non-technical-skills-in-industry/>) aims to introduce students to the social, cognitive and personal management skills necessary for safe and effective work performance. Students learn theories and models of behaviour and then apply that knowledge to the assessment and understanding of real-life case studies drawn from industry.

Both courses are just the first step in the provision of Psychology teaching and learning online. By the end of 2020 at least two more courses will be launched, enabling students to combine all four courses into a PgCert in Applied Psychology, so keep your eyes peeled for further updates.

If you are interested in these courses, please use the links provided above for further information and to register – we look forward to seeing you online in the future!

# Seeing the Self: Me and My Brain

A grant by The Leverhulme Trust



The human brain can be rapidly re-configured to respond to stimuli that are related to ourselves rather than to other people. We have developed a new learning procedure in which we have individuals associate a shape to themselves or to others. Almost immediately after forming this association, individuals show a very large bias towards responding to their own newly associated shape compared with shapes linked to other people. They also need less contrast to perceive self-associated shapes compared to other shapes, indicating that self-

association produces a perceptual change in the way that stimuli are seen. These changes in perception are related to altered connectivity within the brain in which regions associated with self-processing (in the medial parts at the front of the brain) have increased linkage with areas more towards the back of the brain which respond to salient stimuli in the environment and the dorsal parts of the frontal lobe that are responsible for controlling behaviour. This project will examine how linkages between self-oriented processes in perception and decision-making shift the 'social saliency' of stimuli, so that they then become important for our attention



Professor Jie Sui



Dr Meike Scheller



Dr Jie Chen



Ms Naomi Lee

and thereby influence our behaviour. In addition, state-of-the-art mathematical and neural oscillation analyses will be used to extract and compare cognitive and neural patterns of self and other motivational factors (based on reward and emotion), linked to personality traits and altruistic behaviour, providing an innovative research programme cutting across traditionally disparate areas of the discipline. Team members are Professor Jie Sui, Dr Meike Scheller, Dr Jie Chen, Ms Naomi Lee.

## FIND OUT MORE:

[www.abdn.ac.uk/psychology/people/profiles/jie.sui/](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/psychology/people/profiles/jie.sui/)

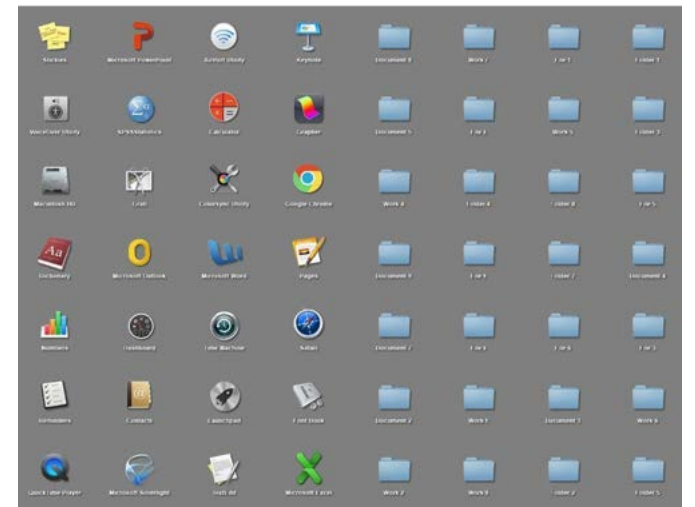
# Deciding How, Where and When to Move Our Eyes

An ESRC grant supported investigation

Imagine searching for your keys in your kitchen. How do you decide how to move your eyes and head around to find them? Did you search efficiently, or could you have saved some time and effort by being more systematic or careful? Our research has shown that people, in general, have a great deal of room for improvement in how they search for a lost item. In particular, they seem to look in locations that they should already know do not contain the item. For example, if your kitchen table is completely empty, there is no need to look there – if your keys were there, you would already know where they were!

The main goal of our research in this area is not to help people find their keys faster, but to understand what processes and factors underlie decisions about how to move the eyes around. We move our eyes 3-4 times every second during visual search, and the goal of most of these eye movements is to pick up information from the environment. Some researchers have suggested we can use peripheral vision to evaluate the visibility of different parts of the scene, and then fixate only the locations where we need central vision to pick up more details. This is an "ideal" approach to search that would be useful in many situations, and there is some evidence to support the idea that humans do search this way. However, an alternative possibility is that we move our eyes based on habits, shaped by evolution and development, and the eyes are therefore not necessarily guided by the information in front of us right now. This approach would be less efficient, but also far less effortful, than an ideal approach.

Are eye movements ideal, or not? It turns out the answer depends on the person. In our experiments, we ask participants to search for a particular target while we monitor their eye movements. We have discovered that some people are ideal searchers, almost always looking in the locations that give them new information. Other people are random, looking in a way that seems to have little to do with where the information is. Still others perform even worse than random, targeting almost all their eye movements to places like the empty table in the example above. How quickly people find targets depends to a large extent on this eye movement behaviour. When we test the same group of people over multiple sessions, these widely varying individual strategies are relatively stable over time.



Individual differences make it more difficult to develop models of eye movements during search. Instead of asking whether eye movements during search are ideal or random, we have to answer a different question: for whom, and under what circumstances, are eye movements ideal or random? This is the main research question we are addressing in this 36-month ESRC grant. To answer this question, we are looking at what kinds of search tasks, layouts, and targets promote more or less efficient search strategies. In a second set of studies, we are looking at individual differences in search to try and explain some of the between-participant variance using related search tasks, cognitive tasks, demographics and personality traits. Finally, we bring these two threads together to look at the role of individual experience with particular environments in shaping more efficient search. The results will help us refine our models of search and will also have implications for real-world contexts in which fast and accurate search is important (e.g., security, health care, search and rescue).

## FIND OUT MORE:

Our article in The Conversation  
A recent review on bias and strategy in search



Dr Amelia Hunt



Dr Anna



Dr Alisdair





### Keeping Up With The News

For more information about what we are up to in the School please visit our [website](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/psychology), follow us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/abdnpsych) and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/abdnpsych), or get in touch with us via [e-mail](mailto:psych@abdn.ac.uk) or phone.



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