Psychological Sciences Newsletter

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News

Department celebrates seven new Professors

The department is celebrating seven promotions to Professor, an extraordinary achievement for everyone concerned! Congratulations to our colleagues Professor Belinda Brooks-Gordon, Professor Richard Cook, Professor Eddy Davelaar, Professor Gillian Forrester, Professor Natasha Kirkham, Professor Anne Miles, and Professor Fiona Tasker.

It is rare for a department to have so many professors appointed in a single year. With Professor Clare Press’s recent promotion (reported in our last newsletter), we have eight new professors appointed this calendar year, which is an incredible professional achievement for our colleagues and testament to the dedication and skills of the department as a whole.

GEMS Study Launched

The GEMS study was kick-started in the GEL lab in May. GEMS, short for the Genetics of Early Milestones and Skills, is being led by Professor Angelica Ronald and Professor Mark Johnson and is funded by the Simons Foundation and the ESRC. Dr Anna Gui is leading the analyses on GEMS, which is to investigate the common genetic architecture underlying infant milestones and skills. Welcome Anna!
Covid-19 survey results

In March, **Marie Houghton** and **Professor Fiona Tasker** published preliminary results of their UK Covid-19 experiences surveys which explored the emotional impact of lockdown on two groups: (i) **LGBTQ+ people aged 18-60 in the UK**, and (ii) **cisgender heterosexual people aged 18-60 in the UK**. They are currently recruiting people to take part in interviews as part of the LGBTQ+ experiences project, focussing on the age group 18-35. Please share the advertisement for participants included below with your friends and colleagues.

![Recruitment Flyer for LGBTQ+ Experiences Survey](image)

New book on families and the transition to adoptive parenting

**Professor Fiona Tasker** and her colleague Sally Wood (Birkbeck and Institute of Family Therapy) together with colleagues at [CoramBAAF London](https://www.corambaaf.org.uk), have published a monograph on family processes during the transition to adoptive parenting. The monograph and an introduction by Dr John Simmonds at CoramBAAF are available via [CoramBAAF’s website](https://www.corambaaf.org.uk) as: Wood, S. & Tasker, F. (2021). Adopting Minds: Working with the Internal, Family and Systemic (IFS) issues in adoption. London, UK: CoramBAAF.
New book celebrates the work of Professor Annette Karmiloff-Smith

In May, Professor Denis Mareschal, Dr Victoria Knowland and Professor Michael Thomas published a new book with Routledge: Taking Development Seriously - A Festschrift for Annette Karmiloff-Smith: Neuroconstructivism and the Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Understanding the Emergence of Mind. The book celebrates Annette’s career and reflects her wide influence in the field of developmental psychology, including contributions from many of her former students and colleagues. Annette was an influential psychologist and member of our department from 2006 until her death in 2016.

Image: book cover for Taking Development Seriously

The book’s blurb reads:

"This influential festschrift honours the legacy of Annette Karmiloff-Smith, a seminal thinker in the field of child development and a pioneer in developmental cognitive neuroscience. The current volume brings together many of the researchers, collaborators and students who worked with Professor Karmiloff-Smith to show how her ideas have influenced and continue to influence their own research. Over four parts, each covering a different phase or domain of Karmiloff-Smith’s research career, leading developmental psychologists in cognition, neuroscience and computer science reflect on her extensive contribution, from her early work with Piaget in Geneva to her innovative research project investigating children with Down syndrome to understand the mechanisms of Alzheimer’s disease. The chapters provide a mix of cutting-edge science and reminiscence, providing a fascinating insight into the historical contexts in which many of Annette’s theoretical insights arose, including such ideas as the microgenetic approach, representational redescription and neuroconstructivism. The chapters also provide updates about how earlier theoretical ideas have stood the test of time, and present unpublished data from the early years of Annette’s career. Taking Development Seriously is essential reading for students and scholars in child development and developmental neuroscience."
Welcome!

Dr Samara Banno began her Daphne Jackson Trust Fellowship in the department in April, based in the Developmental Neurocognition Laboratory (DNL). Her background is in Information Engineering and her interest lies in developing intelligent cognitive computational and AI models. Having worked both as a lecturer and in industry, she completed her PhD at the University of Portsmouth at school of Energy and Electronic Engineering in 2019. Her project is entitled: Developing an Intelligent Diagnosis Model for Early Awareness of Brain Deterioration in Dementia.

Farewells

We say farewell and good luck to Dr Emily Thomas who recently left Birkbeck following the successful completion of her PhD. She has started a postdoctoral position at New York University with Professor Biyu Jade He.

New lecturing staff appointed for 2021-2022

A recruitment process has taken place this spring and four new lecturers have been appointed to begin in the department next academic year. We are delighted to be able to announce that new colleagues, Dr Daniel Yon, Dr Ori Ossmy, Dr Elisa Ferrè and Ms Joanna Farr will be joining the department. Daniel has previously worked with Professor Clare Press in the Action Lab and Joanna has worked with Professor Jonathan Smith as a member of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Research Group. Ori will be joining us from New York University and Elisa from Royal Holloway. We look forward to welcoming them in person in the new academic year.
Top Media Mentions

Our staff have been attracting high profile media attention

Departmental PhD student, Fotini Vasilopoulos, recently published an article from the MA she completed at the University of Cambridge which has been picked up widely by the press. Her research uncovers how supporting physical activity in young children can help close the disadvantage gap in education. The original article is: Vasilopoulos, F. & Ellefson M.R., (2021) Investigation of the associations between physical activity, self-regulation and educational outcomes in childhood. *PLoSONE, 16*(5): e0250984. Articles about her research were published in the BBC, The Telegraph and across a number of other online sources.

Professor Denis Mareschal was invited to speak on Slovenian radio in a series which addresses questions about the brain. The show went live in October 2020 and the link to the programme has now been shared with us. He spoke about developmental neuroscience for a public audience, answering questions around self-awareness and infant development. Denis was also recently interviewed by Austrian radio on a programme about the sense of touch and haptic learning.

Research undertaken by Anna Dobretsova, a MSc student supervised by Professor Naz Derakhshan within The Centre for Building Resilience in Breast Cancer (BRiC), was featured in the Birkbeck News pages after being published in *Psycho-Oncology*. The research found that younger women with metastatic breast cancer were at greater risk of post-traumatic stress than other groups.

In May, Professor Jonathan Smith was interviewed by the British Psychological Society for their publication, The Psychologist, in an article entitled: *The person becomes the universe of exploration.*

Public Engagement and Talks

The department has been active with outreach this spring

Dr Emma Meaburn has partnered with the UK Trauma Council to support their understanding of epigenetics, its role in linking the environment to health outcomes and how practitioners should approach epigenetics research. She worked with them to produce a video which is available via YouTube and also with transcriptions via the UK Trauma Council’s website.

Professor Gilly Forrester has been active with the SOFAR (Supporting Outstanding Female Academics and Researchers) Network. They were established in 2020 and this year had their first full member’s meeting on International Women’s Day, which was attended by their newly named Network Patrons: Dame Ute Frith, CBE, FRS (Developmental Psychologist) as their academic patron, and Rachel Neaman, RSA (Digital Transformation Specialist, Birkbeck Governor) as their industry patron. To find out more about the network please follow their Twitter feed @NetworkSofar.

Gilly has been running Science Saturdays throughout May on Saturday mornings. Science Saturdays are free science talks live streamed and aimed at a general, family-friendly and global audience. Gilly hosted ten short science talks from researchers in the School of Science, Birkbeck. One of the sessions was delivered by Dr Emma Meaburn who gave a lecture on the impact of DNA variation on how we think, feel and act. Her talk is available to watch via Birkbeck’s YouTube channel and a blog on the talk with links to
the video is also available via Birkbeck’s website. Another of the sessions was delivered by Professor Natasha Kirkham, entitled Baby meets world: growing up in the middle of everything. Her talk is also available to watch via Birkbeck’s YouTube channel.

As well as Science Saturdays, Gilly continues to work with the National Saturday Club, delivering a Masterclass during April. She also wrote a blog for the EI:Smart programme in March where she is a member of their expert advisory panel.

In May, Professor Fiona Tasker gave a public engagement talk for Club Soda and Queers Without Beers on preliminary results from her programme of surveys and interviews on the COVID-19 pandemic. The talk Covid-19 Pandemic Problems & Positives: Alcohol, Substance Uses and Wellbeing Responses Cisgender Heterosexual & LGBTQ+ 18-60 Survey is available online via Club Soda’s YouTube channel.

Dr Ana da Cunha Lewin has worked with the Access and Engagement team at Birkbeck to develop and deliver a five-week Psychology for Education Taster course with a focus on children’s learning, well-being and resilience. The course was aimed at parents and carers who might face barriers to accessing formal education. The Access and Engagement Team have written a blog which summarises the course and the positive experience of the attendees.

In March, Professor Angelica Ronald continued her programme of engaging with schools and supporting young women to access STEM careers with an online talk for a girls’ sixth form careers event entitled: From school to leading a science lab.
Awards, recognition and appointments

On 20 April, **Professor Fiona Tasker** was the External Academic Representative on the Periodic Review panel of the Tavistock and Portman MA Psychoanalytical Studies for the partnerships team at the University of Essex.

The department had a number of nominees across various categories for the *Birkbeck Heroes* awards. These include **Dr Brandi Drisdelle**, **Dr Ana da Cunha Lewin**, **Professor Ulrike Hahn**, **Dr Simon Green**, **Professor Gillian Forrester** and **Ida Akhtar**. Congratulations everyone!

Call for submissions: Birkbeck Effects

Our colleagues in External Relations are capturing stories about inspirational people who have had an impact on the Birkbeck community and life beyond Birkbeck as part of Birkbeck’s 200 year celebrations. If you would like to nominate a member of the Birkbeck community to be featured as part of this celebration, please fill in the [online form](#) and contact Sarah Evans so that she can keep track of who has been nominated from our department. Any member of the community (staff or student, past or present) can be nominated.

Grants

Congratulations to all our staff receiving research grants

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<td>Samara Banno</td>
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<td>Developing an Intelligent Diagnosis Model for Early Awareness of Brain Deterioration in Dementia.</td>
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<td>Marko Tesic</td>
<td>Royal Academy of Engineering</td>
<td>The role of explanation in (re)building trust in AI systems.</td>
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Conference Activity and Academic Talks

Professor Fiona Tasker delivered a lecture entitled, Growing Up With LGBTQ+ Parents: Children and their Parents Map Family Diversity, at the Anna Freud Centre, University College London, UK, Annual Conference: Early Years Conference: The many faces of parenting infants.

Dr Emma Meaburn attended the SAFRI spring meeting and INSAR 2021, both of which were online. Emma was also an invited speaker for Birkbeck’s inaugural Digital Education summit, where she spoke about her and the teams’ experiences in the design and implementation of an online pre-sessional course to aid postgraduate recruitment. The talk can be viewed on SharePoint for members of the Birkbeck community. Due to the level of interest, a follow-up workshop is being planned for late July 2021.

In March, Professor Clare Press gave a talk in a symposium organised by the Donders Institute, Netherlands. The symposium was entitled, Statistical learning: How does the brain learn and predict the sensory world? and was organised by Dr David Richter and Professor Floris de Lange. Also in March, she gave an invited talk to the Decision Sciences Hub, University of Melbourne, Australia, called, The perceptual prediction paradox: how do we render our experiences both veridical and informative?. In May she gave a talk of the same name at the colloquium of the Department of Psychology at Marburg University, Germany.

In March, Professor Jonathan Smith delivered an invited talk to the Catherine Peckham Symposium, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health. The talk was entitled: Qualitative Research as Valuable in Helping to Understand Participants’ Experience of Health & Illness. In April, he delivered an invited workshop entitled: Introduction to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to the Department of Psychology, Ankara Medipol University, Turkey.
Doctoral Activity

Theses awarded

Congratulations to all those successfully defending their theses

Congratulations to Dr Emily Thomas, who successfully defended her thesis with no corrections! Her thesis was entitled: The Perceptual Prediction Paradox: Do Actions Exert a Distinct Influence on Perception? Her examiners were Professor Patric Bach (Aberdeen) and Dr Hinze Hogendoorn (Melbourne). Emily was supervised in the department by Professor Clare Press and Professor Matt Longo. She has already secured a postdoctoral position at New York University with Professor Biyu Jade He.

Congratulations to Dr Viktoria Csink who also successfully defended her thesis. Her thesis was entitled An exploration of the filtering mechanisms involved in infant’s selection of events for deeper encoding and memory retention. She was supervised by Professor Denis Marechal and Dr Teodora Gliga, and was examined by Dr Jeanne Shinksey (Royal Holloway) and Dr Kirsty Dunn (Lancaster University).

Congratulations to Dr Louisa Gossé who also recently successfully defended her thesis entitled: Multi-method exploration of the relationship between sleep and early neurocognitive development. She was supervised by Professor Emily Jones, Professor Clare Elwell and Dr Frank Wiesemann, and her examiners were Dr Caspar Addyman (Goldsmiths, University of London) and Professor Judit Gervain (University of Padua, Italy). Louisa is currently doing an ISSF Wellcome trust postdoctoral fellowship at the CBCD.

Finally, congratulations to Dr Alicja Brzozowska who also recently successfully defended her thesis entitled: Caregiver touch and infant exploratory behaviour. She was supervised by Professor Denis Mareschal, Dr Teodora Gliga, Professor Matt Longo and Dr Frank Wiesemann, and her examiners were Professor Anne Richards (Birkbeck) and Dr Sylvia Rigato (University of Essex). Alicja has secured a postdoctoral position in Vienna.
Theses Examined
Staff from the department are frequently invited to examine doctoral theses at institutions across the country and internationally

Professor Clare Press was one of the external examiners for David Richter’s thesis at the Donders Institute. His thesis was entitled: Prediction throughout visual cortex: How statistical regularities shape sensory processing. The supervisor was Professor Floris de Lange.

Image: David Richter’s thesis defence – an online international viva during Covid-19!

The other examiners pictured above were Professor Nicholas Turk-Browne (Yale) and Professor Rob van Lier (Donders) and the wider defence committee also consisted of Professor Heleen Slagter (VU Amsterdam), Professor Maria Chait (UCL) and Professor Ram Frost (Hebrew University of Jerusalem).

Professor Fiona Tasker was the external for Lucille Kelsall-Knight’s thesis defence at the University of Wolverhampton. Her thesis was entitled: Different Constellation and Shining Stars: Lesbian parents’ experiences of accessing healthcare for their adopted children in England. She was supervised by Dr Fiona Morgan and Dr Debra Cureton.

Professor Fiona Tasker was also the examiner for Susie Bower-Brown at the University of Cambridge. Her thesis was entitled: Navigating a normative world: a social psychological exploration of the experiences and identities of trans and/or non-binary adolescents and parents in the UK and she was supervised by Professor Susan Golombok.

Dr Emma Meaburn was the external examiner for Kylie Glanville at King’s College London. Her thesis was entitled: An investigation of the shared genetic etiology of depression and autoimmune diseases. Her supervisors were Professor Cathryn Lewis and Dr Paul O’Reilly.

Professor Angelica Ronald was one of the external examiners for Christopher Rayner at King’s College London. His thesis was entitled: Exploring the roles of sociodemographic, clinical, and genetic factors on the prognosis of anxiety and depressive disorders. Christopher’s supervisor was Professor Thalia Eley.
Publications

Accepted Manuscripts for the majority of these publications are available via Birkbeck’s repository, BIROn.

Journal Articles


Books


Book chapters