Professor Martin Eimer has been elected a member of the Leopoldina, the German National Academy of Science. The Leopoldina is the German equivalent of the Royal Society and has been in continuous existence since its foundation in the then Imperial Free City of Schweinfurt in 1652. It is now the oldest continuously existing academy of medicine and the natural sciences in the world, and its ethos is reflected in its motto: Nunquam otiosus (‘never idle’).

Honorary membership is the Leopoldina’s highest accolade, and the highest academic honour awarded by a German institution.

Many congratulations to Martin for this outstanding achievement.

Psychological Sciences launches new Centre for Cognition, Computation and Modelling

Birkbeck’s Centre for Cognition, Computation and Modelling (CCCM) launched on 22 March with a one-day workshop on ‘Computational Models of Cognition’ in which the centre’s staff and affiliates presented their research for discussion. According to the centre’s Director, Professor Ulrike Hahn, over 70 researchers from across the UK attended the event.

The CCCM draws on the Department of Psychological Science’s long-standing track record in producing leading modelling research. Its members are actively engaged in top-tier international research in connectionist modelling, symbolic modelling and cognitive architectures, mathematical modelling and Bayesian models of cognition, with ongoing projects drawing on sophisticated computational methods for artificial agents. Main areas of research are: connectionist modeling and development (Professor Michael Thomas; Professor Denis Mareschal); reasoning and argumentation, with an emphasis on Bayesian models (Professor Mike Oaksford; Professor Hahn) and cognitive architectures (Dr Eddy Davelaar; Dr Rick Cooper); and perception and attention (Dr Marie Smith; Dr Tim J Smith). For more information, please visit the CCCM website.
Decoding the Genetics of Intelligence

Twin studies consistently show that general cognitive abilities are substantially heritable, yet genomewide association studies focused on the identification of specific genetic variants have largely come up empty-handed. A study by Dr Oliver Davis at UCL Genetics Institute in collaboration with Dr Emma Meaburn and colleagues at King’s College London sheds some light as to possible reasons for this issue of 'missing heritability' in genetic studies of cognition and other complex traits. The study, which appeared in the journal Psychological Science (see Publications, below) used a new approach called genomewide complex-trait analysis (GCTA) to estimate heritability based on the known genetic similarity of unrelated individuals and compared it to heritability estimates obtained with the classical twin design. Their results reaffirmed that cognitive abilities are heritable, and suggest that the missing heritability gap will be closed with the use of larger sample sizes and the study of rare DNA variants.

Publications

Articles


Articles cont’d


Book Chapters


Books


Grants, Awards, & Recognition

**Professor Ted Melhuish** received grants from the Department for Education: ‘Effective preschool primary and secondary education 3–14 continuation to age 16’ (£112,000) and Cancer Research UK (£25,000).

**Dr Marie Smith** and **Professor Annette Karmiloff-Smith** received a grant from Leverhulme Trust: ‘Exploration of typical and atypical development of flexible face processing strategies’ (£112,203), with Dr Emily Farran (Institute of Education). Professor Karmiloff-Smith was also elected the first non-US-based board member of the Association for Psychological Science.
Invited Talks

Professor Jacqueline Barnes gave an invited talk entitled ‘Implementing evidence-based practice: The formative evaluation of introducing the Nurse Family Partnership programme in England’ at the Department of Health & Social Care, University of Greenwich, on 23 January.

Dr Belinda Brooks-Gordon was an invited speaker at the Edinburgh Festival’s Skeptics on the Fringe event on 13 August 2012.

Professor Annette Karmiloff-Smith gave the following invited talks: a presentation entitled ‘How can studying infants with Down syndrome inform Alzheimer’s disease in adults’ at the LonDownS Consortium Wellcome Trust Strategic Grant Launch Conference on 29 January; a presentation on work/life balance to the SWAN-Athena group at Birkbeck on 25 February; a colloquium entitled ‘Why adult neuropsychology cannot explain neurodevelopmental disorders’ at Staffordshire University on 14 March; a Skype talk on ‘Babies in museums’ for Kids in Museums on 18 March; and an invited talk at the Eisai Conference on Down syndrome on 28 March.

Dr Matthew Longo gave an invited lecture entitled ‘Body representations underlying somatosensory information processing’ at Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, Germany, on 29 January.

Professor Ted Melhuish gave a keynote address entitled ‘Early years research and implications for policy-making: The UK experience’ at a conference of the Research Council of Norway. For details please see the council’s website.

Dr Angelica Ronald gave her Spearman Medal award lecture entitled ‘Seventy years since Kanner’s account, what do we think causes autism in 2013?’ at the British Psychological Society in Harrogate in April, and a departmental seminar on her research at the Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge.

Conference Activity


External Examining

Professor Jacqueline Barnes was an external examiner for the PhD of Ratib Lekhal entitled The relationship between children’s attendance in Norwegian childcare centers and language and behavioral development during early childhood at the University of Oslo, Norway.

Dr Belinda Brooks-Gordon was an external examiner for the PhD of Jay Levy at the University of Cambridge.

Professor Ted Melhuish was an external examiner for a PhD on early interventions for institutionalised children at the Institute of Education.
Dr Belinda Brooks-Gordon was interviewed on Sky News about the scientific data on sexual offending. Dr Brooks-Gordon also took part in a debate on on Radio Cardiff with feminist author/comedian Kate Smurthwaite about research on lapdancing and Dissociative Identity Disorder.

Professor Annette Karmiloff-Smith was interviewed by Jim Al-Khalili for BBC Radio 4’s The Life Scientific on 22 January.

Dr Natasha Kirkham was featured in an article in the Birmingham Press about the Silent Witnesses project, a collaboration with Theatre Centre led by Dr Edward Barker and Dr Kirkham which ‘aims to help children deal with violence they may have witnessed in their community, on television or in computer games’.

Dr Angelica Ronald published an article entitled ‘Comorbidity in autism spectrum disorder and ADHD’ in the January/February 2013 edition of the Carlat Report, an American monthly newsletter that provides clinically relevant, unbiased information on psychiatric practice.

Upcoming Talks

Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development
Seminar Series
1:00 PM on Tuesdays, Malet Street Building

30 April, Room B36
Dr Naomi Dale (Great Ormond Street Hospital)
‘Social communication and autism vulnerability and visual impairment’

7 May, Room 534
Dr Cat Sebastian (Royal Holloway)
‘Neural bases of emotion processing in typical and atypical adolescence’

18 June
Professor Scott Johnson (University of California, Los Angeles)
*Title and venue TBA*

25 May, Room B35
Professor Jean Mandler (University of California, San Diego)
‘On defining image schemas’