

ATP TODAY

The Magazine of the Association
for the Teaching of Psychology

JUNE 2023

www.theatp.uk

The River Stour,
Canterbury High Street.
Image credit: Helen Kitching.

The Problem with Perfectionism

Have you ever been told that a way to
improve your mental health and wellbeing
is to take part in regular exercise?

HIGHLIGHTS

ATP International
Psychology Teacher's
Conference 2023

Breaking down the barrier
between university
and pre-university



We welcome contributions and letters from readers. Please send your correspondence to the Editor. The Editor reserves the right to edit and/or amend all articles submitted.

The views expressed by contributors to the magazine are their personal views, and publication does not mean that those views are endorsed by the ATP or the publisher.

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Please send correspondence, and submissions, as a Word document. Photographs should be supplied as jpegs and as separate files not embedded into Word documents.

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Regulation (EU) 2016/679) is a regulation by which the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission intend to strengthen and unify data protection for all individuals within the European Union (EU). In line with this directive the ATP would like to remind you of our data protection policy.

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From the chair

Hello and welcome to the Summer edition of the ATP Today magazine. It is the Easter break as I'm writing this and the weather is far from summery!

I feel it is important to reiterate something that was shared on our social media pages. The ATP Committee would like to formally express our sadness following the death of Ruth Perry and send our heartfelt condolences to her family, colleagues and former students. We also support and welcome any move by OfSTED towards the possibility of removing one-word school ratings, and are pleased to hear that Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman has acknowledged that: "the arguments in support of this are legitimate." The effects of negative labelling are well-researched and have been known for many years. Stress caused by OfSTED inspections was cited in coroners' reports on the deaths of 10 teachers in the past 25 years. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills state that they aim to 'improve lives by raising standards.' Do they actually succeed in this aim?

So, the question is: Is OfSTED fit for purpose? What do you think? I look forward to reading your opinions on social media; you can find us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. Our next edition of ATP Today will feature an opinion page looking at your responses. Be sure to check out the second opinion page in this magazine featuring your views about teacher strikes.

You'll have noticed already that all things ATP

have had a little refresh, namely, the magazine and the website. The website has undergone a larger transformation and is now much more easy to navigate and use, particularly when viewing on your mobile or tablet. We've tried to catch all the glitches, but if you spot something please let the website team know via email - myself or Harriet Ennis.

We hope you will be able to join us at the Annual ATP Conference on the 7th and 8th July at the University of Kent. It is lining up to be one of our best yet!



Amy Halsall
#Psych4Life



We hope you will be able to join us at the **Annual ATP Conference on the 7th and 8th July at the University of Kent**. It is lining up to be one of our best yet!

From the editor

It feels like ages since I've sat down to write an Editor's Welcome and as I write this one, the weather (where I am at least) seems to be on the turn and we're enjoying warmer and drier days. I hope you are too. The exams will more or less be over for the students by the time you read this and many of us will have marking season ahead of us, as well as the conference in July to look forward to.

In this issue there is a piece relating to how psychology is organised within the school and college curriculum, you may well have contributed to the psychology as a science survey Deb Gajic and Helene Ansell conducted. In addition, we have two in-conversation pieces which are really interesting, one of which is between Helene Ansell and the Editor of the Psychologist, Jon Sutton on the barrier faced between university and pre-university courses. The Psychologist publication has already featured the conversation in its April 2023 issue and kindly given us permission to print it for you. It's certainly thought provoking

and topical and October's ATP Today edition will feature a follow up which I can't wait for you to read.

Congratulations to our first puzzle page winner! See the puzzle page in this issue to find out who it is, page 10. While you're there grab a pen and have a go at the maths puzzle.

Finally, I'm inviting you to extend a warm welcome to our newest Editor, Sarah Moseley, who is editing the October issue later this year. Although she will probably start work on it quite soon now this issue has arrived with members! If you're attending the conference you have a great opportunity to speak to Sarah in person about any article ideas you have. We welcome ideas related to teaching, learning and / or assessment, features (basically, anything psychology related that interests you will interest readers), book, documentary, film and podcast reviews and student corner contributions.

Take care and have a great Summer.



Laura Quaife
ATP Today Editor

From the BPS

We are nearly at the end of another academic year, a very different one for many. Examinations are back and the students continue to amaze us with their determination and growing love of psychology. For the ETB it has been an interesting year as well. We have continued to put together a program of free webinars for teachers and students at schools and colleges. This year we held a 'Meet the Psychologist' where Dr Lyndsey Hughes a Health Psychologist talked about the many roads and routes into his field of Psychology. In March we put together a Revision Techniques and Coping with Examination Anxiety webinar ably presented by Lucinda Powell and Deb Gajic, which was very well received. Sadly, the proposed Maths anxiety and statistics webinar had to be postponed but I am hoping it will be rescheduled later in the year or form part of next year's program.

This year I have been joined on ETB by Deb Gajic and together we have worked hard to promote Pre-university psychology within BPS and carried out some research related to Psychology as a Science and its place within school departments and developed links with the BPS branches. We are working on increasing our links with DARTP who are keen to restart promoting the Teachers Toolkit again. Many of you have taken advantage of the ATP/BPS affiliate membership by using the code given by the ATP. We hope you have found this useful.

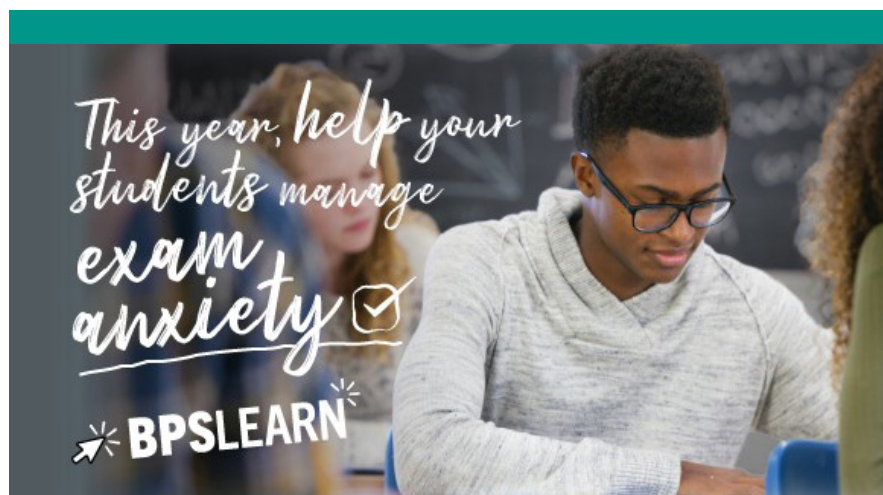
A further member of ETB, Mark Sergeant a senior lecturer in Psychology at Nottingham Trent University has also recently joined the pre-university strategy group and together we are developing a webinar for next year for HE lectures explaining exactly what is involved in Pre-University psychology and the strategies that may help transition and retention on the first year of a psychology degree.

We hope to see you all at some point over the next year and if we can help you in any way please contact Deb Gajic or me and we will endeavour to help in any way we can.

Helene Ansell
CPsychol, AFBPsS
ETB Board member



the british
psychological society
promoting excellence in psychology



Support your students during high-stakes examinations

We know that high levels of exam anxiety can damage the wellbeing and academic achievement of adolescent students. Fortunately, brief and low intensity cognitive behavioural interventions have been effective in providing adolescent students with the skills to manage their exam anxiety, but not everyone will have the confidence, knowledge and background to effectively and confidently lead groups of students through this period.

Help your students reach their potential

To help school staff to confidently advise on how their students can perform their best academically, the British Psychological Society (BPS) has launched the STEPS (Strategies to Tackle Exam Pressure and Stress) online course.

Created by Professor David Putwain, Professor of Education and Early Childhood Studies at Liverpool John Moores University, this eLearning course has been developed specifically for teachers and support staff to help tackle exam stress in their students, and can be completed in three hours.

Once you have completed the three modules, you will be equipped to use the range of supplementary materials to deliver the STEPS intervention to small groups, and to evaluate student progress through the intervention.

Why take this course?

- Study online at a time that suits you.
- Develop your ability to identify which students would benefit from intervention for exam anxiety.
- Deepen your understanding of the psychological root causes of exam anxiety.
- Gain the ability to deliver the STEPS intervention to your students
- Evaluate the impact of intervention on your students.

Tried and tested

The STEPS intervention has been tested in three formal evaluations with schools, which reported that they are successful in alleviating exam stress and anxiety in students. In one study, 82 per cent of students who took part in the workshops described STEPS as helpful*. One student who took part in the programme when asked to summarise their experience of the STEPS intervention stated that it "helped me understand the reasons I panic and how to overcome it".

The course will build your confidence, give you a psychological understanding of the root causes of exam anxiety, and help you discover new ways to help support your students through a difficult period that may affect their future opportunities.

Empower your students to perform at their best. Search STEPS at learn.bps.org.uk

EFPTA Update



The most recent EFPTA event was a very successful international online webinar on Saturday 18 March, on climate change and sustainability in psychology education. We were aiming to have an expert speaker Dr Dan O'Hare of Bristol University to give our keynote talk on "The climate crisis, young people, and psychology", highlighting the role of psychologists / psychology educators in addressing young people's concerns about climate change. However Dr O'Hare was struck down with the flu the night before so Jock McGinty stepped in to cover his session by summarising Dr O'Hare's article in the BPS Psychologist magazine, 'The climate crisis, children, young people and educational psychology' (2022). This was followed by two workshops:

Jock McGinty on: Whole-school approaches to sustainability - Sustainability is all about tackling climate change by promoting positive actions to reduce or mitigate its effects. Can sustainability be embedded in the life of a school, and can all staff and students be involved in building a sustainable school culture? What can psychology teachers bring to a whole-school approach? And

Morag Williamson and Mette Eggertsen on: Learning activities in the psychology classroom - Climate change is probably the biggest challenge that our young people will have to face. It is a phenomenon which involves numerous psychological processes – cognitive, social, mental health etc. This workshop suggested practical learning activities to help students develop an understanding of these processes in relation to climate change and beyond. The report "APA Task Force on Climate Change (2022) Addressing the Climate Crisis: An Action Plan for Psychologists" (<https://bit.ly/3FyZe7E>), which prominently features the role of psychology education at all levels, was highlighted as a model approach that national psychologists' associations should take.

Delegates from across the world, Iceland to the Philippines, discussed examples from teachers' experiences, classroom activities on psychology and climate change in breakout rooms. A final plenary highlighted the need to discuss this topic further.

The webinar was enthusiastically welcomed and received lots of positive feedback from delegates. Thank you to all the ATP/ATPS members who took part! I am sure this topic will appear at the next EFPTA conference on 18-21 April 2024 (provisional dates) in Helsinki, Finland – keep an eye on the website for more details!

Meanwhile during 2023 EFPTA Board will meet in Stockholm in May, and in Edinburgh in November.

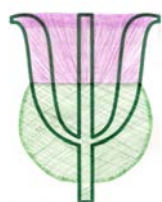
See the website (www.efpta.org) or get in touch (info@efpta.org) if you would like more info.

**Jock McGinty,
Mairi Rice
and Morag
Williamson**



Helsinki Central Library Oodi.
Image Credit: David Quaife

ATPS Update



Members of the ATPS committee attended a joint zoom meeting on 24th January with representatives from BPS-Scotland. It was hoped that by meeting we would renew our collaborative approach across the two organisations, to support and promote psychology education at school/college level, and it did just that. Very positive discussions about the teaching of psychology in Scotland were had and we are all looking forward to nurturing this connection between the two bodies.

A proposal was made during the meeting to hold a joint CPD event for psychology teachers. Further CPD has been our focus this year so thank you to those members who

have completed the online survey letting us know what they would like in terms of venue, topics and timings. If you have yet to fill us in on your preferences then please do answer the following questions for us – <https://forms.office.com/e/vmyALLYVQE>

We will then use your responses to plan this joint event which has been proposed to happen sometime during November.

Meanwhile, ATPS continues to actively contribute to the European Federation of Psychology Teachers' Associations (EFPTA, www.efpta.org); our representative Mairi Rice took part in the recent webinar on climate change and sustainability in psychology education, and plans are afoot to host EFPTA's autumn 2023 meeting in Scotland.

**Mairi Rice
ATPS**

ATP Conference 2023 University of Kent

It is not too late to book for the ATP International Psychology Teachers' Annual Conference. **This year the event will be held at the University of Kent, Canterbury Campus, 7 - 8 July 2023.**

Why come to the conference?

The ATP conference is for teachers of psychology and will offer updating sessions on psychology, presentations and workshops on teaching and learning, and opportunities to meet with exam boards representatives and to share good practice.

It is the number one CPD event for teachers of psychology in the UK.

The two-day ATP Annual conference boasts over 40 workshops to enhance your CPD on a wide range of topics from teaching and learning to current research. We offer residential and non-residential packages as well as one-day CPD events. Delegates who book the one-day package are welcome to join us for our evening wine reception, giving you invaluable time to network and socialise. We look forward to welcoming you to the conference whether you are old friends or newcomers!

The conference also attracts around 20 exhibitors including publishers and other providers of teaching resources.



Helen J. Kitching,
CPsychol, FBPSS
Conference
Organiser
and the ATP
Committee

It's a special year

This year we will be celebrating 40 years of ATP conferences. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19, we were unable to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the ATP. However, we plan to celebrate 40 years of conferences in style and party like it is 1983. So, bring your rara skirts, white handbags, rolled up jacket sleeves and white socks and party to your favourite 80s hits at the gala dinner!

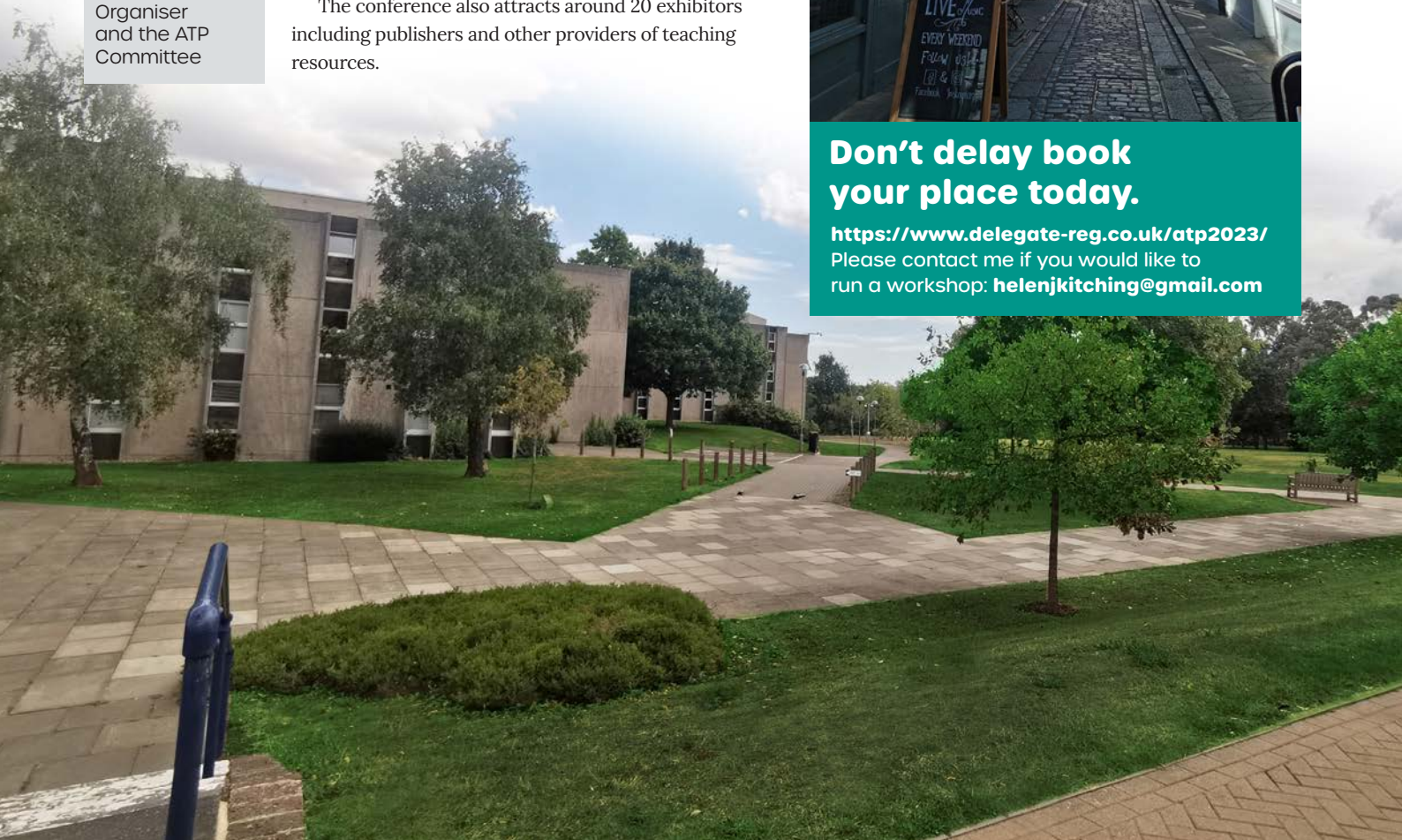
There will be a prize for the best 80s costume!



**Don't delay book
your place today.**

<https://www.delegate-reg.co.uk/atp2023/>

Please contact me if you would like to run a workshop: helenjkitching@gmail.com



Keynote Speakers 2023

We have three fabulous keynote speakers at this year's conference:



Dr Lindsey Cameron (presenting on Friday)

Reader in Psychology at the University of Kent

Growing up in a Diverse World: Insights from social and developmental psychology

We are entering an age of increased societal diversity, extending across social categories including ethnicity and race, religion, gender, disability and many other areas. This diversity is reflected in our schools and colleges. In an increasingly diverse world, understanding how young people experience diversity, how they are shaped by it, and the strategies used by young people to manage diversity, is essential for the well-being and success of future generations, and a key challenge for educators today.

In this talk, I will provide new insights and cutting-edge research from social and developmental psychology to examine young people's experience and understanding of diversity, focusing on social relations across lines of difference. Specifically, in this presentation I will draw on intergroup contact theory, and contemporary findings, to examine such questions as: How do children understand social groups and differences? How do young people form relationships across lines of difference? What are the barriers and promoters of these important relationships? How do young people understand discrimination, equality and justice? And what is the role of schools, families and peers in these developing abilities, understandings and behaviours?

In a changing world, and an increasingly diverse one, there is more than ever a need for increasing our knowledge about how children and young people understand, respond to and thrive in diverse settings. We will consider how psychological findings can be applied to promote social cohesion and positive youth development in education settings.

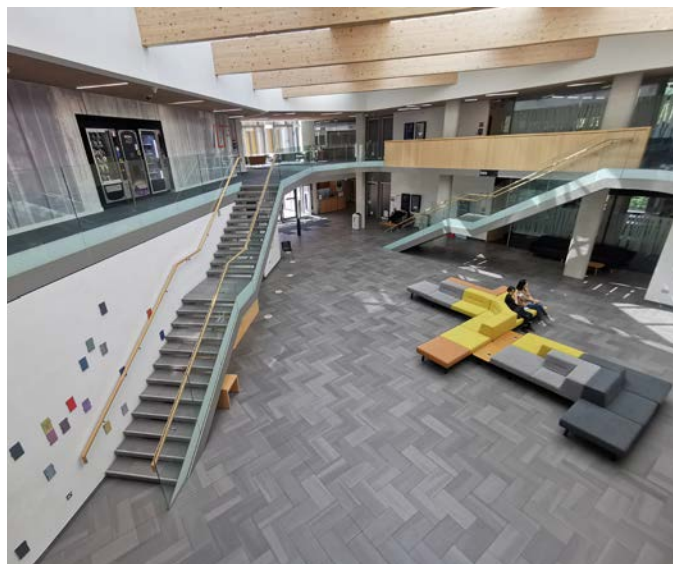
Dr Ashok Jansari MA (Cantab), DPhil (Sussex), CPsychol, AFBPsS. (presenting on Saturday morning)

Goldsmiths College, University of London

Why do we know less about the human brain than the dark side of the moon?

We can replace hearts, help create babies in vitro and are making great strides in fighting countless diseases. Despite this, we know less about the brain than we do about the surface of the moon. And yet the brain is ubiquitous in society; it constantly appears in news articles, in advertisements for brain-trainers and in debates about how to improve children's (and adults'!) brains through education.

During this talk will be taken on a guided tour of the functioning of the human brain, dispelling some of the myths while revealing its wonders. The fascinating field of cognitive neuropsychology - the study of individuals with brain damage to gain a better understanding of the functioning of the intact brain - will be explored through examples of patients with very selective disorders. How these findings can help others with brain damage will be demonstrated as will the exciting abilities of improving the functioning abilities in healthy adults. Finally, in a coming-together of eastern philosophy and neuroscience, the incredible impacts of mindfulness meditation both on the physical body and the brain will be introduced.



Dr Bo Kelestyn (presenting Saturday afternoon)

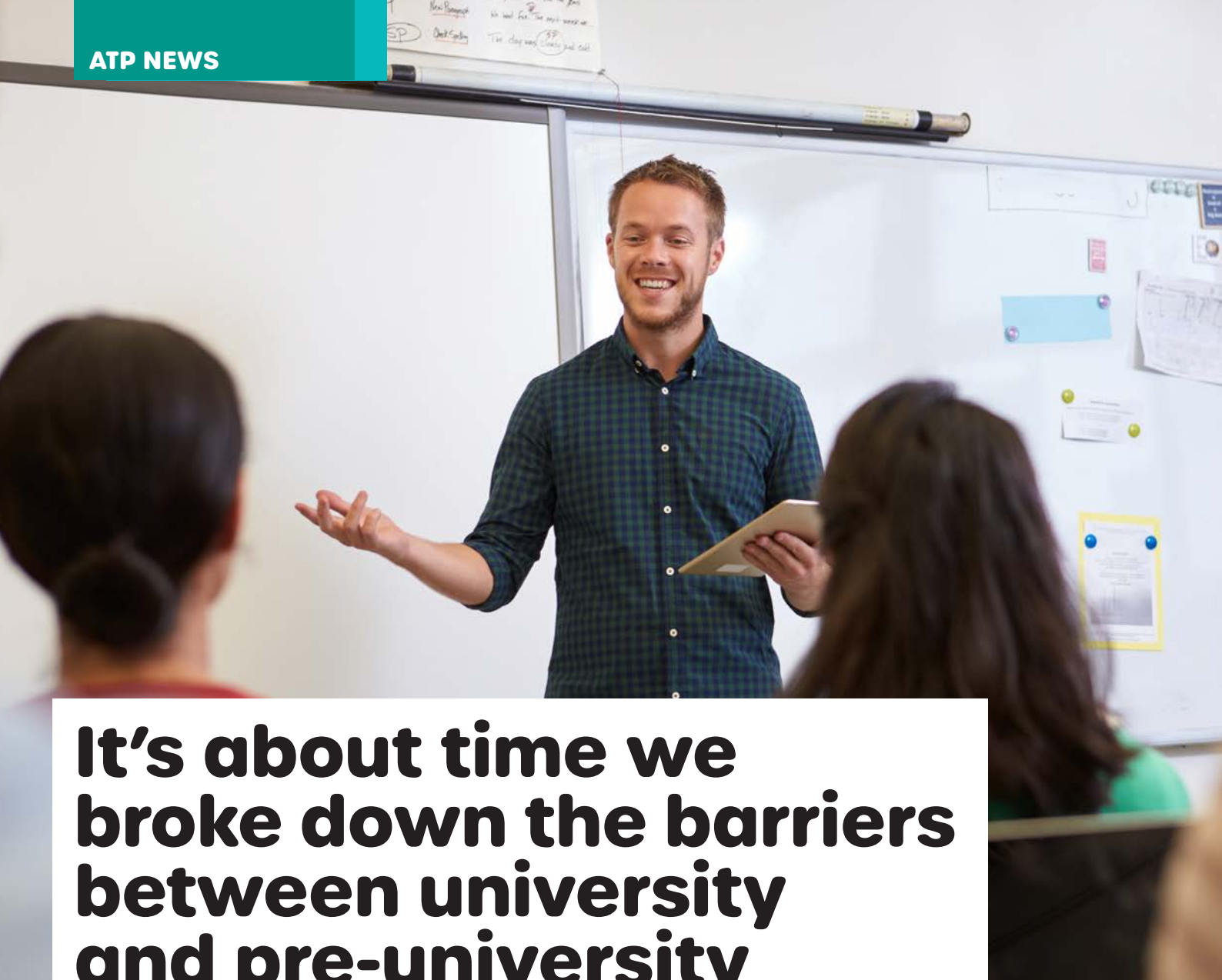
Associate Professor at the University of Warwick and Innovation Consultant at Sprint Valley

What does it mean to innovate in your teaching and learning? Lessons from design thinking.

Innovation in teaching and learning, particularly in the pandemic and post pandemic world, is expected. But it does not happen by chance. There is a need to understand and pinpoint the ways in which we can co-create innovation within the enabling constraints we are working in.

Design thinking, as a way of thinking and doing things differently, can help us reframe this challenge into opportunity. It presents new possibilities for the teaching community. With its multiple touch points to psychology, it has the potential to reinvent what and how we teach and inspire ourselves in the process of inspiring the next generation of psychologists.

In this keynote, we will explore design thinking as a tool and a mindset. Used by some of the most successful organisations worldwide it builds on multiple concepts from the discipline of Psychology. Together we will uncover practical steps in which you can embed its principles into your teaching and learning innovation, as well as your personal and professional development.



It's about time we broke down the barriers between university and pre-university

Editor of The Psychologist Jon Sutton in conversation with Helene Ansell, from the British Psychological Society's Education and Training Board.

Lovely to meet you, Helene. Tell me a bit about yourself.

I'm a Chartered Psychologist, with a background in teaching, Secondary Education. I taught A-level psychology for 23 years. Over that time, my class size ranged from 10-12 initially, to classes of 35-40, with over 100 in each year group. This was nothing unusual for those teaching psychology.

Did your experience lead to your involvement on the Education and Training Board?

Absolutely. In 2014 I was elected Chair of the Association for the Teaching of Psychology (ATP), where for four years I gained considerable knowledge and experience on the teaching of pre-university psychology. Once I retired, I still wanted to put this experience to good use, so I applied to join the BPS's Education and Training Board, working with its first Chair, Juliet Foster and latterly Niamh Stack.

Almost immediately, I was given the remit of improving the BPS engagement with schools and colleges. We set up a focus group and quickly set about producing the BPS Teachers Toolkit (www.bps.org.uk/teachers-toolkit). In the last couple of years, we have successfully run a series of pre-university webinars and established a memorandum of understanding between the BPS and ATP: both parties agreed to work on joint initiatives to share knowledge and create opportunities for continuous professional development for psychology teachers. If you are a member of the ATP, there is a special access code to join the BPS as an E-subscriber, and for a small sum of £6 gain access to some BPS materials. In addition, we are involved in ongoing discussions, such as around psychology as a science.

Last year we did several free webinars for teachers and students. This year we have already completed a Meet the Psychologist webinar where the attendees met with a Health Psychologist and discussed Health-



BPS Teachers Toolkit
www.bps.org.uk/teachers-toolkit

related careers. February saw a Maths in Psychology webinar – why we use statistics in psychology, and maths anxiety, with Professor Victoria Bourne and Catherine Van Saarloos from the Advanced Mathematics Support Program. We are also planning a webinar on revision strategies.

I have heard that higher education institutions don't really want you to have done A-level psychology.

You've hit a sore point here, as there appears to be a lack of understanding, in my view, about the value of A level/Higher level psychology. The specifications have all had University input. Some have had some of the red brick universities involved in their development. It's about time we broke down the barriers between university and pre-university... we need to be working together. We get a good percentage of young people coming through with A*, A, B... with 57 per cent of those entered gaining A*-C. This shows that the young people do have a particularly good grounding in Psychology. Even some of those getting Es still have a good grounding, as the way psychology is taught in schools and colleges today prepares them for what's going to come at university. That old idea of, *'will they really understand psychology when they get to university, because they wouldn't have been taught it properly?'*... For obvious reasons I find this belief a little offensive.

The present-day mode of teaching in schools is not spoon feeding students. That's not the way it works in secondary schools anymore. There is an awful lot of independent learning, research analysis, critical thinking, that is implicit as well as explicit within the A-level or higher level specifications. It is so frustrating when my own students have told me that their first year at University studying Psychology was basically useless... they didn't learn anything new. Some even said that their lecturers felt that what they'd learned at school or college was all irrelevant, incorrect ... that's tough when it comes back to you as a teacher, from the past students who have all succeeded at a high level before university. Even more concerning here is the Academic's opinion of my ability to teach psychology. Would they like to hear this of their own teaching? How would it make them feel?

What do you think is going to shift that? If the higher education institutions themselves have been involved in the criteria for the courses, is it just a certain generation of lecturers in higher education who still hold outdated views?

It's probably a mix of things, including that old school belief that what you've been taught before doesn't really apply when you get to university. The only way to break it down is to get a small group of pre-university teachers and heads of university departments together, and really talk it out. I am not the only person who hears those comments from their past students and I really appreciate how difficult it is for a lot of teachers to hear this... they are being damned when their

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students go to university by the academics, they're hearing 'all your teachers have taught you all the wrong things'. This does not create harmony. I know I haven't taught them all the wrong things and I am pretty sure others haven't either. This just shows almost a lack of respect for the value of what's come before.

In terms of that value, how far would you push it? I've heard that some on the Board argue for making Psychology A-level a requirement for Psychology study at degree level?

Yes. For maths, they want you to have maths A-level, so some might argue that if you're going to study psychology, you should have A-level psychology. My thinking, along with that of many on the ATP committee and their members, is that this requirement may be a tough ask but it would be creditable if 'desirable' could be used. What harm would that do? Let's meet halfway here. If we can't have it as a prerequisite for entry onto a degree level course, then surely it could be desirable.

Why wouldn't they do that?

I don't know. The comments I have heard are that they don't want to discourage young people who haven't taken Psychology. However, this term is used in other course requirements or even job applications, but it doesn't put people off applying for the course or applying for a job. And the argument that not all schools offer Psychology is no longer valid as Psychology is the second most popular A-level in England.

It's not like you'd be asking for any kind of fringe subject to be a requirement.

Exactly. Psychology's growth continues; the number of students entered for the GCSE is still very small and this could be because at GCSE level psychology is classified as a humanity and not a science, which it is at A-level. That's a dichotomy which needs addressing. Young people and their parents will go to an open day for sixth form or university, and be gripped by what they hear. However, because of a lack of knowledge and understanding some parents will ask the teachers, 'is psychology an academic subject?' I was a little gobsmacked the first time I heard



this, but quickly found I had a large group of parents listening to the scientific nature of psychology and then wanting to take the subject themselves! In schools not all teachers have psychology degrees, and I think it is important that the BPS and ATP together work together to help these teachers, and this is the aim of the CPD being carried out by both associations. It is also important that together we help teachers who are being put in an unenviable position of being required to teach health and wellbeing topics without the correct expertise or training, something that the BPS can and is assisting with.

Good. What would you say your priorities for the coming year are, in terms of your involvement with the Board?

To support the research on 'psychology as a science'. To encourage the BPS to support the view that psychology in schools and colleges could/should be placed in the science faculty, rather than humanities. They will certainly gain more funding if classified as a science! We have just carried out a small-scale survey of teachers relating to whether psychology is a science and to ascertain what faculty/ their subject is placed. The findings overwhelmingly support psychology as a science.

Finally, and most importantly, I'd like to gain ground in relation to the discussion on Psychology A-level/ higher level qualification being 'Desirable' for entry on to a psychology undergraduate course. I have suggested that myself and Deb Gajic, also on the ETB, meet with the Academic Heads of Psychology to discuss this.

It's great that Psychology is so popular, but there does tend to be a slight uneasiness, I guess, about pushing loads of people into the Psychology education funnel, when there aren't necessarily the professional jobs at the end of it.

I'll freely admit, there are not many roles out there to be a professional psychologist. But there are a huge number of peripheral Psychology posts where you're not a psychologist, but you are using your psychology. If you've got a degree in Psychology, you could work in for example HR, Occupational therapy, work in hospitals, Marketing, Education, all without being a psychologist. This is something that I have been working with the BPS careers department on, and webinars have shown there are many possibilities other than being a psychologist. Psychology is a lot more than just being a psychologist. It's about understanding how people work and how they behave. You can still use your psychology in that broader market.

Well, thank you for your time and for all the work you're doing on behalf of the Society. A-level teaching is quite close to my heart... it's been a long time since I did it, but it goes down as one of the hardest things I ever had to do.

You've hit the nail on the head, it is hard. Some specifications have huge content, much of it very contemporary. It's not an easy teach, and it's not an easy learn either. So that's a reason why it's super important that the BPS is there to support pre-university teachers and students.

Originally published in The Psychologist, from the British Psychological Society, April 2023.

Brain Teaser

We have our first winner!

Congratulations to Elis Forbes Turner for correctly completing last issue's word search and finding the hidden message of 'I hope someone enters the competition this time folks!'

This edition's brain teaser is a maths puzzle. Solve the puzzle by adding the missing numbers or symbols. Best of luck!

Entries should be emailed to UKpsychED@hotmail.com with the subject heading: 'Prize Puzzle 3' and your name and address with a clear image of the correctly completed puzzle.

The draws for this puzzle will occur on Friday 21st July 2023 and the winner will receive a £10 Amazon voucher. Only current ATP members are eligible.

12	+		=	36		45	+		=	42
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**Helene Ansell
& Deb Gajic**

Psychology as a Science

Helene and I were tasked with undertaking a small-scale research project on behalf of the Education and Training Board within the BPS.

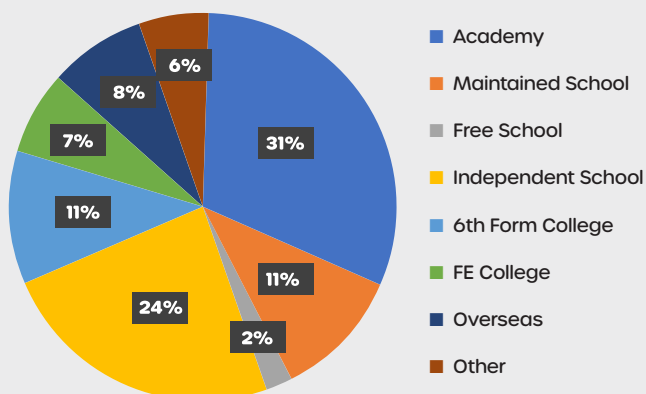
We were interested in perceptions of psychology in schools and colleges and in particular whether it was seen as a science, social science or humanity. This question is complicated by the fact that at GCSE level, psychology is classified as a social science and at A level it is classified as a science by OFQUAL. At university it is almost always classified as a science and the majority of degrees are Bachelor of Science (BSc).

We recruited our participants by sending an all-members' email via the ATP database and social media posts with a link to a Google form. The questionnaire was made as short as possible so that potential respondents would not be put off. In total we had 182 respondents.

Question 1

What type of school/college do you currently teach in?

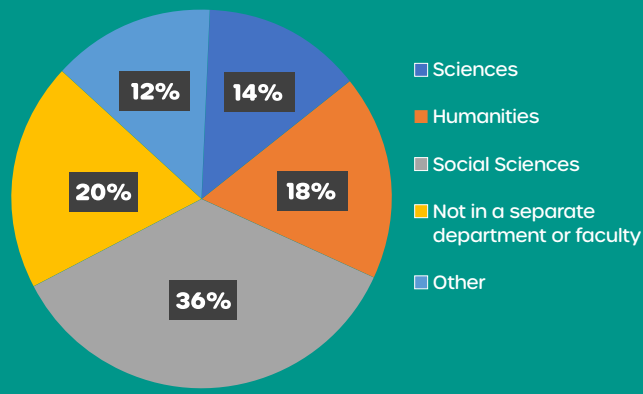
The results show that data was collated from the full range of types of colleges and schools where psychology is taught.



Question 2

In which department or faculty is psychology placed?

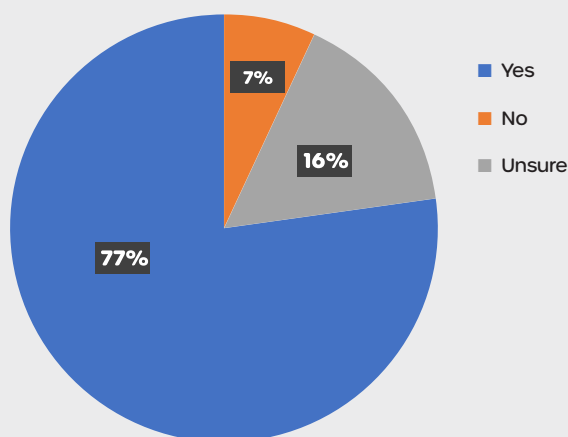
The most popular department/faculty for psychology to be placed in was social sciences. There is some confusion as GCSE psychology is classified as a social science, whilst A Level is classified as a science. The structure of schools and colleges in terms of departments and faculties is not standardised and the concept of clusters of subjects has been gaining popularity in some schools and colleges, where subjects grouped together have little in common. The qualitative data gives more insight into this issue of where psychology is placed within the structure of a school or college.



Question 3

Do you think psychology should be classified as a science?

It is pleasing to note that the vast majority of respondents did agree that psychology should be classified as a science. The qualitative data suggested that this was due to subject content and a desire for the status of science, so that psychology was not viewed as a 'soft option'. Some of the qualitative data suggested that those that did not think psychology should be viewed as a science had a personal preference not to be placed within the science department/faculty of their school/college and valued their autonomy



Question 4

Can you explain your answer to the above question?

Below is a selection of the most representative and interesting comments.

Most common answers included reference to scientific methods:-

- 'Despite the more verbal aspects of the A Level (the fact that it is still considered to be an 'essay subject', most of the discussion (even in the essays) is based on the fundamental premises of science.'
- 'There are scientific principles in research methods that are used to explain and research behaviour - it is also classified as a science by OFQUAL in their subject level guidance and conditions and requirements.'
- 'Content is hugely scientific - biopsychology, addiction, stress: mode of action of drugs, structural complexities of brain, inferential statistics, research methods and processes etc; discussion requires thinking like a scientist to evaluate the validity of the research studies' conclusions.'
- 'It depends on the context. I teach Cambridge Specification and that is very emphasised on academic structure and experimental design, thus, I believe in terms of how the syllabus is structured it should be a Science. However, in terms of student recruitment and advertising, I think many have certain assumptions (excuse the pun) about what a science is and what you do in science, and thus they would misunderstand exactly what Psychology is - this may well result in them not choosing the option due to this.'
- 'The amount of scientific content has increased at GCSE, so a certain level of scientific knowledge and ability is required. Same goes for the increased maths understanding in the research methods section. The writing style needed for answering exam questions is also much closer to a scientific style. Students have

to be trained to write in a much less creative way than they use in other subjects.'

- 'The fact that most of the research the students learn about is experimental - it's a science.'

The fact that most of the research they consider uses quantitative data - IT'S a science.

The fact that to be psychologically literate they need to understand scientific terminology - IT'S A science.

The fact that they need to be familiar with research methods - IT'S A SCIENCE.

The fact that they have to learn about stats testing - IT'S A BLOODY SCIENCE!!!!'

- 'Psychology is a BSc. Why do we give mixed messages early on in education about where it sits, and the academic rigour involved? It also is accepted by many universities as a science when applying for courses such as medicine. There are no other social sciences which require the scientific content Psychology does. The subject should also reflect its current standing in academia.'
- 'It is a science, but the pure sciences seem resistant to accepting it as such, which devalues the subject.'
- 'The GCSE and A Level specs are built on the assumption that Psychology is a science as it follows the scientific method, and a core part of the content is made up of experimental research. I think Psychology has much more in common with Biology than humanities subjects such as History. If students go on to study Psychology at university, most degree courses are now BSc, rather than BA, reflecting the modern understanding of Psychology as a science.'
- 'To share the funding, accolade and resources afforded to STEM subjects. Perhaps even better training bursaries to train and retain prospective new teachers.'

However, not everyone agreed:-

- 'Social science' describes it well enough.'
- 'I've worked in schools where it is classified as a social science, and I feel this has been a better fit. We feel like an isolated branch in the science department and apart from some of our really scientific topics like bio and research methods - we may be better there.'
- 'Because we are a social science and qualitatively different to the physical sciences. We need to be managed by social scientists who understand the nature of what we're doing. I have been in places in the humanities, science and now social science faculty at my school. My most effective manager was head of the humanities faculty, and his specialism was sociology. My least effective manager is the head of the social sciences faculty, and her specialism is Economics.'
- 'There are different/more than one/ psychologies. One dimension of psychology is scientific. Defining it as a science excludes aspects that are relevant but not scientific.'
- 'I am currently in an academy school and 6th form. I'm in a department of Social Sciences and it is made up of Psychology, Sociology, Criminology, Health & Social Care and Law. We do both GCSE/BTEC Equivalent and A-level. I think this is where Psychology should be placed in departments.'
- 'I am a psychology teacher and there's no point being defensive about it. I think a lot of sociologists and psychologists don't like the idea that their subjects might not have the same scientific standing as physics, biology and chemistry. Even the recent nomenclature 'social sciences' reeks of the desperation psychologists might have to be considered as watertight

scientific as the traditional sciences. I understand there are epistemological, philosophical and scientific issues about just how scientific the traditional sciences are, but I think Kuhn said it best when he said that there is no set paradigm in psychology just yet. You could use a number of approaches to explain human behaviour and thought (cognitive, biological, behaviourist, psychodynamic etc) but there isn't a set paradigm, so although psychology absolutely can be 'more' scientific I am comfortable saying it's not as scientific, or a science, as the traditional sciences may be considered.'

Question 5

Any other comments?

Below is a selection of the most representative and interesting comments.

- 'Making Psychology a science would help student/parent misconceptions that it's a 'soft' or 'easy' subject to take at A Level.'
- 'Possible issues with classifying it as a science include competition in option blocks. Blocked with the other hard sciences, it runs the risk of being chosen by students as a 'soft' option.'
- 'Having Psychology in the Science building at our school helps raise the profile of the subject.'
- 'As a psychology teacher I hope that schools change this misconception urgently.'
- 'The government classifies Psychology as a Science so students should be given an option to do triple science OR Psychology.'
- 'The whole idea of the Psychology movement was that human behaviour aimed to be studied scientifically. Without this in my opinion it reverts back to Philosophy. It's not always perfect and often lacks external validity but if we base therapies on research this needs to be backed up with objective data.'



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Conclusions

The vast majority of teachers we surveyed agreed that psychology should be classified as a science. The main reasons cited were scientific methods and the nature of the content. There were teachers who still preferred to be classified as a social science, but this was often because of concerns about how they would be viewed by colleagues in science departments (Technically yes, but please don't put me with the science dept'). There is no doubt that classifying GCSE Psychology as a Social Science adds to the confusion. Entry numbers for GCSE Psychology have been in decline due to initiatives such as EBacc (English Baccalaureate) and Progress 8, these focus on the 'core' subjects of Maths, English and Science and tend to marginalise optional subjects. Classifying Psychology as a Science at GCSE would undoubtedly boost entry numbers, if it counted as a science in these measures.

A further issue is that many teachers are asked to teach a second subject and psychology is often taught by non-specialists, their specialism will inform whether or not they think psychology should be classified as a science or not.

Given that A level Psychology is the 2nd most popular A level in England (Maths is 1st) (63490 entries 2022) (<https://thinkstudent.co.uk/most-popular-a-level-subjects/>), it should receive the recognition and status that it deserves. Clarity on the scientific status of psychology in schools and colleges requires increased awareness of the scientific nature of the subject with both teachers and senior leaders. As respondents noted clearer classification could improve funding too: - 'To share the funding, accolade and resources afforded to STEM subjects. Perhaps even better training bursaries to train and retain prospective new teachers.'

It is because of these factors that Helene and I, as part of the Education and Training Board at the BPS, will be sharing these findings at the next ETB meeting and hope that the BPS can help to promote and raise the profile of pre-university psychology and represent and support teachers at this level.



Toward Mastery in Psychology

A Model of Teaching & Learning



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The NCETM (2017) developed 'Five Big Ideas' for mastery maths teaching and learning, based on Singapore/Shanghai models and research and evidence. As a maths and psychology teacher, I have attempted to translate and adapt this approach for teaching psychology.

Below are my 'mastery statements'. I place coherence at the centre; surely, for teaching and learning to be most effective, everything has to 'make sense', to teachers and learners. Representation and Reasoning, in my view, build on the foundations of Systems and Fluency.

Teaching & Learning Statements:

Coherence

Teaching and learning build a cumulative and interconnected curriculum, allowing all students to develop a deep understanding of psychology, its subfields and its applications.

Representation and Structure

Teaching and learning is carefully layered and linked, referencing a range of examples and topics of study, allowing students to tease out common themes and develop strong and flexible models of psychological concepts that they can apply in a range of contexts.

Psychological Reasoning

Teaching and learning maximises opportunities for discussion, conjecture, explanation and thought, engaging students in precise psychological communication and cultivating thinking skills.

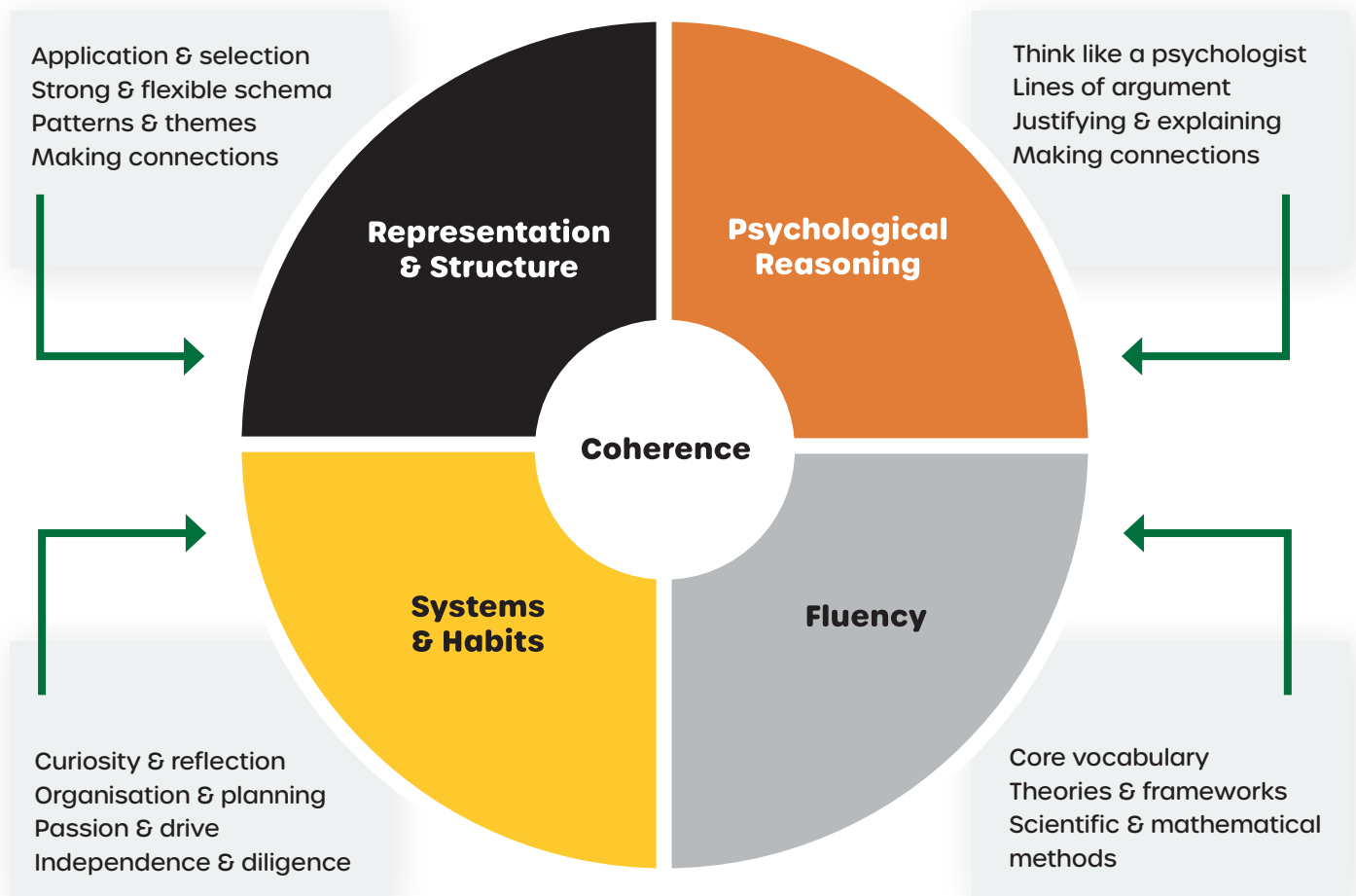
Systems and Habits

Teaching and learning requires students to exercise independence, to organise and plan, and sparks curiosity, nurtures passion and promotes scholarship, thereby supporting the development of positive study and thinking behaviours.

Fluency

Teaching and learning values core concepts and terminology, and so requires students to recall and select key facts and procedures efficiently, accurately and judiciously, affording students strong foundations in psychology and thereby freeing up future mindscape for higher-level activity.

Representation and Reasoning, in my view, build on the foundations of Systems and Fluency.



Let's drill down a little into how this might work in classrooms. Thomas Guskey (2010), a researcher and educational psychology professor, highlights six core elements that, while not unique to mastery learning, are consistently associated with successful teaching and learning:

1 Diagnostic Pre-Assessment

We must check whether students have the necessary knowledge and skills to tackle new learning. Here, the teacher should aim to uncover misconceptions. In a lesson on the influence of early attachment on later experience, for example, some probing of knowledge of some of Bowlby's work, particularly the internal working model, and self-report methods would be helpful in guiding and pitching the lesson. When students come to expect this, they can build preparation and review habits.

2 High-Quality Group-Based Instruction

As psychology teachers, we know about 'zones of proximal development' and scaffolding. High quality teaching should initially centre on direct/explicit demonstration. This involves breaking down material, questioning, modelling and scaffolding, building on Rosenshine's Principles (2012). When teaching students to write an effective evaluation, model this on a whiteboard, pointing to the structure used (whether this be PEEL or similar) and explaining the chain of reasoning. Try not to be drawn into discussion here. With this example still visible and fresh, students try a similar task, with the teacher circulating and checking.

3 Regular Formative Progress Monitoring

Students' understanding and attainment of the material so far must be elicited, in order to check that the intention has been realised. The teacher must give immediate feedback and act on this as appropriate. For example, once students have been taught about a theory, a brief quiz on key terms and concepts might be implemented to check that it is appropriate to move on to application or evaluation of this theory.

4 High-Quality Corrective Instruction

Building on assessment of progress, the teacher must make use of the knowledge gleaned. If students have not understood, a complete 'reteach' is probably not the best

use of time. The teacher must be secure in their subject knowledge and pedagogy, and confident in drawing on a variety of analogies, representations and explanations. In my school, we have also tried having 'support packs' containing simple summaries available on desks.

5 Follow-up Parallel Assessment

In-class assessments are not 'final'. Guskey argues that students who fail a test, and pass at the second attempt, have still reached the desired standard. We might liken this to driving tests: those who pass after multiple attempts are still afforded the same privileges as those who pass for the first time. This approach can support engagement and

We might add ideas from the work of leading mastery advocate Mark McCourt (2019), former director of the NCETM, teacher, leader and inspector.

1 The role of the teacher is crucial

The teacher must have subject expertise; they need to know the age- and curriculum-related expectations, and how to get there. We have several exam boards for psychology, so it's vital to know your stuff. Look at past papers, mark schemes and examiner reports, and mark if you have the chance. As noted above, teachers also need to be able to draw on a variety of examples and explanations. They need to be able to break down material, as well as assess it and uncover (and correct) misconceptions.

2 Relationships enable teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are social activities. Students must have confidence and faith in their teacher, and view them as holders and enablers, as opposed to gatekeepers, of knowledge. At KS4/KS5, building independence is crucial. Relationships also underpin focus and behaviour in lessons. Furthermore, we must be comfortable enough to tackle some challenging concepts in psychology, both academically and emotionally.

3 A 'conveyor-belt curriculum' is not helpful

This refers to the relentless march toward exams/the end of the year typical in UK schools. In terms of psychology, this is tricky. There is a lot of content to cover and no getting away from pressures of

motivation; I have often found that students focus on 'grades' rather than 'getting better'.

6 Enrichment and Extension

While those who need additional instruction receive it, others should deepen, but not move forward in, their learning. For example, in a lesson on the Multistore Model of Memory (MSM), students could be exposed to theories such as flashbulb memory or levels of processing, and asked to reflect on what it means for the MSM. These theories are not required (for some exam boards), but offer powerful evaluation. Knowing what is out there and having some links or resources to hand, digital or otherwise, is necessary here.

exams. However, we need to avoid leaving students behind. As best we can, we must view psychology as one big, interconnected subject, rather than 'getting through' lessons or units. Lessons should build on common themes, and teachers and students should look for opportunities to make connections to previous and future learning.

4 All students can learn

Vital to this approach is the belief that all students can learn psychology, given the right conditions. These conditions might be time, motivation, student-teacher relationship and/or lesson style. A key role of the teacher is to cultivate the right conditions, and to consider whether the curriculum has been 'learned' rather than 'taught'.

5 Teaching and learning should draw on cognitive science

As psychology teachers, we are well-placed. We need to capitalise on our understanding of things like scaffolding, cognitive load, the forgetting curve and encoding/retrieval. We are fortunate too, that our subject enables us to teach students about some of this (e.g. during 'memory'), which will support them in their other subjects and in life more generally.

While I have applied these ideas to psychology, they are not unique to the subject. While a consideration of one's own teaching and learning context is vital, a focus on these elements will support both teachers and learners. Further refinement and debate is needed, so that we can continue to strive toward a best-fit approach for both teachers and learners in a high-pressure and often uncertain world.

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Investigating neural correlates underlying Charles Bonnet Syndrome



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Charles Bonnet Syndrome (CBS) was first documented by Charles Bonnet in 1769, describing hallucinatory experiences of his grandfather, Charles Lullin, following bilateral cataract surgery and subsequent visual deterioration. However, the term was not coined until 1936 by de Morsier (1936), defining CBS as the occurrence of visual hallucinations in patients with intact cerebral function and no psychiatric history. Since recognition in the ICD-11, CBS research has skyrocketed, an estimated 60% of total literature published in the last decade alone. However, despite this, neural mechanisms behind CBS are still relatively unknown, with current theories describing deafferentation and hyperexcitability of neurons in the visual cortex.

Aetiology and clinical presentation of CBS is complex. Most cases occurring in geriatric populations with a history of vision impairments such as glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration, due to the lack of diagnostic criteria and clinical awareness, CBS is diagnosed through exclusion of other pathologies, often mistaken for dementia or Parkinsons. Thus, it is crucial for CBS to not be misinterpreted as delusions, psychosis, or psychiatric conditions – CBS patients retain an unusually high level of insight and awareness regarding hallucination plausibility. This is contrasted by psychiatric conditions such as schizophrenia or dementia, whereby an incorrect sensory perception of reality is so strong it causes a false belief. CBS hallucinations are silent, always localised in the external visual field and are split into two types: Elementary hallucinations (Painter et al. 2018) consist of flashes, squiggles, dots, or ‘worms’ in the periphery. Alternatively,

Complex hallucinations are well defined and sharp, despite the patient’s lack of visual acuity, often reported as vivid faces, children, dolls, and animals.

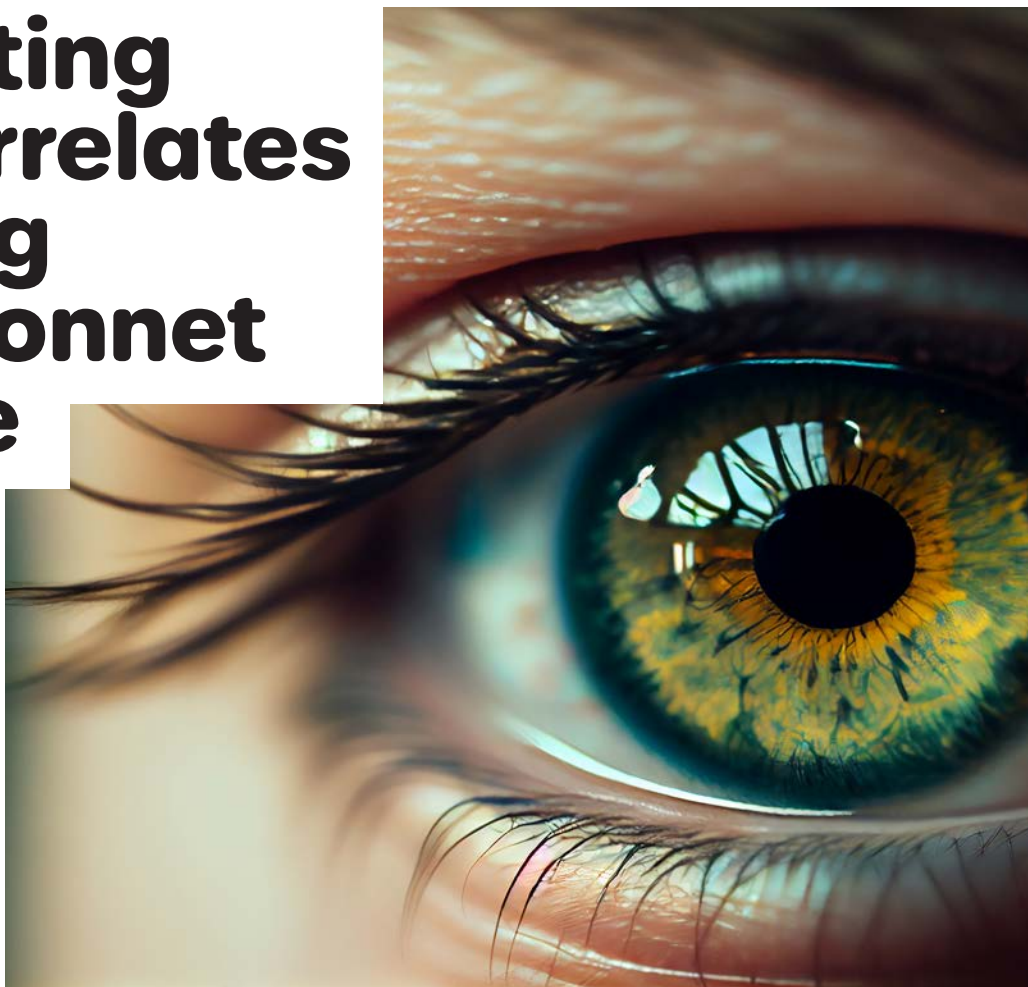
As mentioned, lack of clinical awareness means CBS is often undiagnosed, misdiagnosed, or overlooked. Coupling with an ageing population, it is critical to understand this condition now more than ever, so patients can receive correct diagnoses and care. The confusion regarding CBS is shown through variance in prevalence rates of patients with visual deficits, ranging from 0.4% to 40% (Vojniković et al. 2010). These numbers are vastly inconsistent, potentially for a few reasons. The first being lack of understanding and awareness by clinicians. The second being fear from patients thinking they are going insane and reluctance to come forward. Consequently, it is crucial to remove stigma surrounding CBS, providing clarity and awareness to clinicians so they can diagnose patients correctly.

Deafferentation and hyperexcitability

Neurobiological theories of CBS at a neural level are those of deafferentation and hyperexcitability. Deafferentation proposes

visual impairments result in loss of sensory input to the brain and subsequently cause abnormal synaptic functioning in the visual cortex (Coltheart 2018). Hence, it can be hypothesised one way the visual cortex compensates for sensory deprivation and attempts to restore homeostasis, is by lowering threshold activation levels of deafferented neurons in the visual cortex. By doing this, less sensory input is required for neurons to fire. However, Marschall et al. (2020) believes this compensation mechanism promotes instability and increases excitability of neurons, therefore becoming hypersensitive. Due to lower neuronal activation thresholds, patients mistakenly perceive external stimuli that do not exist as hallucinations.

Functional neuroimaging of CBS patients supports this. Upon experiencing hallucinations of facial distortion, face-selective areas show significantly increased activation. Additionally, increased activation can be seen in area V4 during colourful hallucinations, and the middle fusiform gyrus when objects are hallucinated (Lawn and Ffytche 2021; Pang 2016). The increased level of activity measured by fMRI can be





attributed to deafferentation of neurons due to lack of sensory input causing unstable neuronal hyperexcitability and spontaneous firing, therefore triggering hallucinations in absence of external stimuli.

If deafferentation and hyperexcitability truly are contributing towards hallucinations, one way to test this hypothesis would be through deliberate inhibition of spontaneous firing. It could be predicted the inhibition of spontaneous firing would cause a significant decrease in frequency of hallucinations, by lowering levels of excitatory activity. Recent investigations sought to identify potential benefits of inhibitory transcranial direct current stimulation (tDCS) to areas of the visual cortex, finding significant reduction of hallucinations in CBS patients (da Silva Morgan 2020; daSilva Morgan et al. 2022). This evidence demonstrates hyperexcitability of neurons can be controlled to an extent through tDCS. An encouraging finding when considering potential rehabilitation of CBS patients. However, the duration of the inhibitory effect after tDCS, or rate at which neurons become deafferented again are not known. This area of research is sparse – there is a lack of studies regarding inhibitory

tDCS and CBS. However, despite procedural invasiveness, this proposes promising results for rehabilitation through reducing hyperexcitability.

The influence of psychosocial factors in CBS

While visual impairment is indisputably a major biological factor contributing to sensory deprivation, it can also be argued CBS is exemplified through environmental factors, such as social isolation. Casting doubt on strictly neurobiological theories, suggesting influence of psychosocial factors on the development of CBS.

Recently, studies have taken advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to investigate association between sensory deprivation, social isolation, and CBS symptoms. As many of those with CBS are medically vulnerable, they would likely be required to self-isolate. Therefore, it can be assumed patient's levels of social interaction would significantly decrease. Previous research by Teunisse et al. (1999) highlights low levels of extraversion, shyness and loneliness are all significant risk factors for developing CBS for the visually impaired. Thus, a psychosocial approach to CBS could hypothesise staying indoors, without change in scenery, will increase levels of social isolation, and reduce sensory input, thus resulting in an increase of hallucinations. In support of this hypothesis, Jones et al. (2021) interviewed CBS patients about their hallucinations and changes since the pandemic. A significant interaction between levels of loneliness, social isolation and the nature of hallucinations was found. As patients were shielding, increase in hallucinatory symptoms cannot be attributed to exposure to the virus itself, but instead sensory deprivation from social isolation that comes alongside shielding.

Alternatively in Canada, those shielding were permitted to reduce social interaction within a permitted bubble. A follow up survey found 90% of CBS patients reported no change in hallucination duration, and 62.2% reported no change in hallucination frequency (Kinakool, Moro, and Steeves 2022). This supports the argument that psychosocial factors such as social isolation and sensory deprivation can exacerbate CBS symptoms, and potentially that increased social interaction can to some extent prevent further deterioration of CBS.

In summary, many papers have supported sensory deprivation caused by social isolation as a risk factor for exacerbation of CBS symptoms. While neurobiological

deafferentation and hyperexcitability is detrimental, deprivation via psychosocial factors such as shielding and decreased social interaction appear to intensify CBS symptomatology, causing an increase in hallucinations. By reducing social isolation in those with CBS, the deterioration of symptoms could potentially be prevented to some extent.

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The impact of working with other people's traumatic experiences

In August 2022, I interviewed Professor Jessica Woodhams*, a Chartered Psychologist and an HCPC registered Forensic Psychologist, as well as Head of Research at Birmingham's School of Psychology. Her primary areas of research are policing and sexual offending. The interview focuses on Professor Woodham's work on the impact of traumatic material on professionals in analytical and secondary investigative roles working in criminal justice settings. We also discussed the strategies people employ to cope with the challenging nature of their work and how these can be both positive and negative. Here is a summary of our interview.

What is the advantage of individuals being forewarned if they're going to be exposed to challenging cases?

Analysts and other back office staff talk about the importance of being able to mentally prepare themselves for what they're going into. That could mean being able to share with a colleague what's depicted in a video or image and being able to say to them what's roughly there. This allows the person who has to look at it in more detail for a longer period of time to mentally prepare. One of the things that we do within our own research teams when they're working on distressing material is we have an upfront conversation about what we think we will find

difficult to work on and we're able to say if we don't wish to work with certain material.

What are the most common negative outcomes following this type of exposure?

I think hyper-vigilance, intrusive thoughts and people having nightmares can be quite frequent, but they may come with greater exposure or if a case was particularly pertinent to you as an individual. Analysts also talk about becoming cynical and losing trust in other people. I think that's one of the most tricky things with this work is that, certainly for my line of work, sexual offense has happened in so many different settings, in a lot of cases, you'll know cases that have happened in most of the settings you encounter, so you've got the potential for constant reminders of the cases that you've worked on. Some people, not a large number, certainly also talk about sleep disturbances - struggling to sleep and becoming burnt out.

What are some of the most common coping strategies people use?

Social support is really important. In a lot of these roles, they can't really talk in detail about what they've been working on with their friends and family because they have to keep it confidential - their peers and colleagues



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at work are really important because they know what they've been working with and they have that shared experience with them. People also try to keep their home and work life separate. People talk about their journey home being important because it puts physical distance between what they've been working on and their home. Some people will also talk about avoiding things that relate to their work, so they don't want to interact with any sort of crime fiction stuff at all. They want to have that sort of psychological separation between what they do at work and what they do to relax.

Is emotional detachment considered to be a negative coping mechanism?

We haven't got the evidence yet to say whether it's bad or actually helpful, but people certainly do. People may try to emotionally detach from their work, in terms of pretending that what they're looking at isn't real. So in the past, when a rape victim was giving their account, they co-wrote with the police officer a statement, so it was written in a very standardised and factual way. This involved the emotional impact that it had on the victim, in very factual terms of what happened, and in what order, and it's easier to pretend that's not real. Some analysts have talked about how now that you have the victim's interview that you're working with on video, you're able to see the victim and you can really see their distress. If you're able to see their distress, it's harder to pretend it's not real. Some people in their work end up going to court and then they'll actually see the victim and the victim's family. If it's a case of murder, again, that makes it all real and you can't really pretend so much that it's not real and you can't emotionally detach from it as much when you've got that very emotional stimulus in front of you.

What are some of the negative coping mechanisms people use?

Disregarding obvious things like relying on drugs and alcohol to cope, there are less obvious ones, but we aren't really sure at the moment whether they're definitely negative. However, people will talk about thought suppression - so when thoughts about their work come into their mind, they try to suppress those thoughts. There is some theoretical work that suggests that thought suppression can be harmful - this comes from models of post-traumatic stress disorder that would suggest that thought suppression is a problematic thing to do, but we haven't got the data yet to prove that.

What impact would being hyper-vigilant have on an individual?

It creates this sense of threat all the time and so you're constantly scanning your environment for evidence of a threat to you. A lot of people talk about hypervigilance leading to them not enjoying activities they used to enjoy. So for me, I was quite young when I was an analyst and I liked going to nightclubs, but I soon stopped liking going to them as I was just aware

that offenses can occur and start there. I was just looking at the environment thinking, that person looks really vulnerable to me, are they going to be okay? Or, I don't like the way that person's looking at them, they're looking at them in quite a predatory way - and so you weren't switching off from work, you were just transferring your work to your social environment. So it can lead to people really not enjoying life's experiences as much.

Did you ever manage to overcome that?

No, I just stopped going. I might well have been reaching an age where it was less of a draw anyway. I honestly think you need some therapeutic support. It doesn't necessarily mean that you have to be engaged in long-term psychological therapy, but I think people need some psychological input around how they appraise the situation differently - so sort of cognitive reappraisal and working through the idea that yes, you've seen offenses that have started or have occurred in that environment, but it is rare for that to happen and it's unlikely to happen to you. I'm not an expert in this area at all, but I think that's where the input of a clinical psychologist can be very helpful in helping people think about these things in a healthier, more rational way.

Did you notice any positive impacts that resulted from this type of exposure?

Yeah, so I definitely worked on some cases where we had positive outcomes, not necessarily that someone was arrested, but that I knew my analysis had helped the police in their investigation - and that was really important for me to have that feedback, that my work was worthwhile because I was exposing myself to difficult material because I wanted to help protect others who were vulnerable. I don't think you can do this work very easily unless you know that what you are doing is having a positive impact. You certainly feel pride in what you're doing, you know you're working for societal good.

In summary

I'm extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to interview Professor Woodhams and talking with her has given me an in-depth understanding of the many negative impacts working with traumatic material has. Her work has shown how repeated exposure to distressing content can negatively influence the thoughts and feelings of these individuals; this highlights the sacrifices they make on a day-to-day basis in order to help others. This research is highly beneficial to society, providing us with strategies that could be employed in order to maintain good mental well-being while in these important roles. Professor Woodhams' research emphasises the importance of analysts and secondary investigators in protecting our societies and ensuring justice for victims.

The interview focuses on Professor Woodham's work on the impact of traumatic material on professionals in analytical and secondary investigative roles working in criminal justice settings.

**This interview has been published with the consent of Professor Woodhams.*

The Problem with Perfectionism



Ezmee Giddens,
Year 13

Have you ever been told that a way to improve your mental health and wellbeing is to take part in regular exercise? Sport has been scientifically proven to have psychological benefits alongside the physical improvements. But can taking part in sport ever have a decline in mental health? As a regional champion acrobat, I wanted to see whether competitive athletes have a worsened mental wellbeing. I decided to research the degree to which mental health differs between competitive and non-competitive gymnasts. I decided to study this by creating a questionnaire online and I used the data of 60 voluntary gymnasts across Staffordshire to see whether the competitive or non-competitive gymnasts were more likely to become exposed to mental health problems.

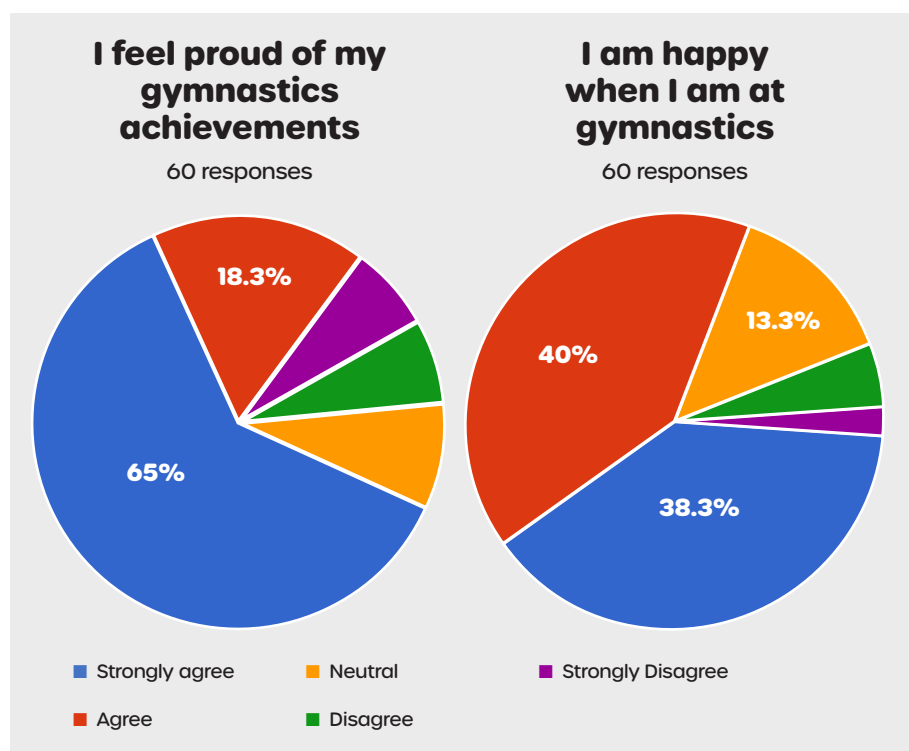
There is very limited research on the psychological wellbeing of elite level athletes however those with such mental health issues have been scrutinised by professionals in the medical field. Being an elite or competitive athlete there are intense demands that are not only physical but also are mentally draining. A friend of mine who is a non-competitive gymnast had said to me that "competitive gymnastics seems like a chore rather than going to have fun" and so this inspired me to research gymnastics. For my questionnaire I used a series of questions that related to mental health and how they feel about gymnastics training. The answers to these questions were recorded and used to calculate a score corresponding to how declined the wellbeing of the gymnasts was. The study found that the level a gymnast performs at does have a significant effect on their mental health and wellbeing. It was found that the more competitive gymnasts did in fact have a more declined wellbeing score compared to the non-competitive gymnasts. To ensure the results were not due to chance I completed a statistical test which resulted in a significant difference.

One part of the questionnaire included a statement and the gymnasts had to say to what extent they agreed with this. The statement was "I feel happy when I am at gymnastics". The results show that despite the standard that the gymnasts were training at, the majority of the respondents are

happy whilst at gymnastics training, which is supporting the idea that sport has a positive impact on mental wellbeing. However there were still 21.2% of respondents who either felt neutral or disagreed / strongly disagreed with the statement which supports the contrasting statement that sometimes sport can begin to have a negative impact on an individual's mental wellbeing. As a competitive gymnast myself, I know that going to training can seem daunting and it's easy to become anxious before going so I put a statement relating to this in my questionnaire. The question asked was 'do you feel calm before going to gymnastics training?'. The non-competitive gymnasts were more likely to agree with this statement in comparison to the competitive gymnasts who were more likely to disagree. 81% of the non-competitive gymnasts agreed and only 73% of the competitors agreed. Although both types of gymnasts agreed more with the statement there were 19% of non-competitive gymnasts who disagreed or strongly disagreed and then 27% for competitive. This could be due to the added pressures of competitive training and the more disciplinary coaching aspects that take place yet shouldn't be ignored.

I also found that 83.3% of the gymnasts felt proud of what they had accomplished in gymnastics which suggests that there are no major mental wellbeing concerns raised that need to be considered from an ethical point of view. I also found that the majority of gymnasts enjoy going to gymnastics and it was an overwhelmingly positive result to receive. It reinstates the stability and wellbeing of the gymnasts being mainly positive. This therefore provides a supporting argument that sport is good for mental health.

Overall, the findings of my study could have practical applications in the care and welfare of gymnasts especially those who are competitive. It shows that the competitive gymnasts do have mental health struggles more so than non-competitive, so more action should be taken to reduce the chances of them developing mental health illnesses. Despite the fact that there were few major concerns raised the findings do illustrate a clear decline in mental health so the national governing body of gymnastics in the UK, known as British Gymnastics, should ensure the coaches are trained on mental health, have workshops available, and more support available for the gymnasts who need to reach out and speak to someone.



Book Reviews

The Pyramid Mind by Dr Vlad Beliaevsky

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Ltd

ISBN: 9781398507463

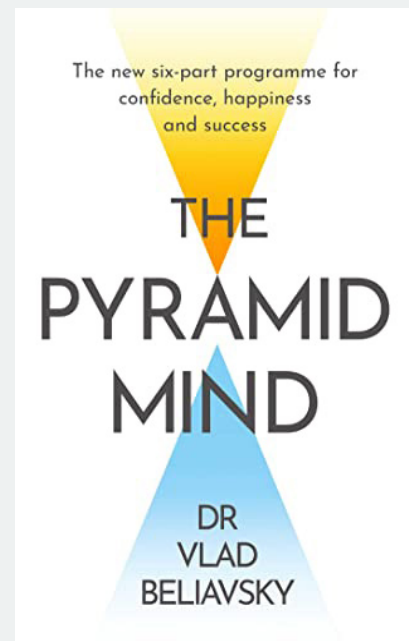
Vlad is a psychologist, philosopher and author. He was born in the Ukraine and educated in the UK. He enlisted in the Ukrainian army when Russia invaded the Ukraine in 2022 and supports his fellow soldiers with psychological support. It is a real achievement that he has also managed to complete his book 'The Pyramid Brain' which was published this year.

The book provides a model for achieving 'true well-being and optimal brain functioning' and offers a thought-provoking insight into how our minds are interconnected. The book includes research and components of therapies such as CBT, Mindfulness and psychotherapy. There is a fascinating chapter that looks at integration between the therapies. Whilst chapter two explores different types of memory from working

memory through to implicit and explicit memory. Other chapters focus on mastery of things such as words, emotion, memory, thoughts, behaviours and attention.

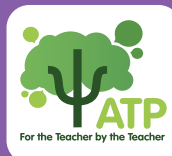
The book is clearly written and includes many personal anecdotes and examples, such as the trauma impact that having a stroke had on legendary US sprinter, Michael Johnson and how he fought back from being unable to walk to sprinting again, that make the book an interesting and compelling read. The book also includes practice exercises to help you work towards enhanced well-being and brain function. These could be integrated as classroom exercises in tutor time, for example.

The Pyramid Mind would make a great addition to any psychology library.



Review by Helen J. Kitching,
CPsychol, FBPsS

What do you think about... ?



For our next opinion page, tell us what you think about the current strikes and teachers' pay & conditions. Should teachers be able to strike?

In the February 2023 edition and on social media, you were asked if teachers should be able to strike. Here are your comments...

On Facebook

D.G: Of course teachers should be able to strike. No teacher takes this action lightly. What I find ridiculous is that my teachers' pension is index linked so it rises with inflation in April, but teachers' salaries don't!!!!

L.J.H: I agree! I agree with and respect the right of teachers to strike. I also don't believe in covering for those who are on strike as it undermines them!

However, I would personally never go on strike as I'm treated very well and would feel bad about disadvantaging my students. I also don't like the idea of a general strike.

H.G: Well said, everyone has the right to withdraw their labour without pay, and if you are in an industry where disruption could lead to death, then workers unions should be trusted to have their own guidelines and responsibilities, as they always have and worked within. I find it terrifying how fundamental rights are being eroded. I only recently learnt that teachers are only allowed to have 6 teachers from their own school on the picket line!!



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Neuroticism: Where Does it Come and What Does it Do?



Leon Guan
Abingdon School

The personality trait of neuroticism in the Five Factor Model of personality refers to relatively stable tendencies to respond with negative emotions to threat, frustration, or loss. It is characterised by negative affectivity (e.g., feeling down constantly), detachment (e.g., not able to fully engage with their feelings or the feelings of others), psychoticism (e.g., aggression), and disinhibition (e.g., addiction to alcohol).

Compared to the other four personality traits (i.e., openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness), neuroticism is associated with psychopathology and physical disorders the most as it magnifies the individual's tendency to experience negative affect. It shows a robust correlation with different mental and physical disorders, as well as comorbidities. For instance, it is commonly associated with mental disorders (such as anxiety disorders) and personality disorders (such as antisocial personality disorder and borderline personality disorder), and substance use disorder (e.g., alcohol dependence). One of the most common mental disorders that neuroticism is associated with is depression, and the link between the two has been well established in multiple studies. For example, in a longitudinal study that involved 547 teenage participants from ethnically and socioeconomically highly diverse high schools in Chicago and Los Angeles, those who scored high on neuroticism were more likely to develop symptoms for depression later. Similar conclusions were also drawn in a large-scale clinical study of Chinese Han women, in which elevated levels of neuroticism were found to increase the risk for the onset of major depressive disorder.

Besides psychopathology, neuroticism is also associated with a wide array of physical maladies, such as cardiovascular diseases and malfunctioning immune system, possibly due to the neurotic individuals' tendency to engage in unhealthy activities like alcohol consumption and smoking. The link between neuroticism and physical problems can be direct and indirect. The individuals' response to a stressful event, for example, can lead to enhanced physiological response (e.g.,

increase in cortisol production), resulting in alterations in and stress to the immune system. It is important to note that the correlation between physical health and neuroticism had been investigated through longitudinal studies, and this personality had been found to be a strong predictor for those maladies when other factors like age, sex, education, and life experiences were controlled. A 21-year study that involved 5,424 British adults can illustrate this point, where the researchers found that those who scored higher on the spectrum of neuroticism also suffered from increased mortality rate from cardiovascular disease. Therefore, finding effective intervention measures that can be deployed regularly can reduce the risk for developing these diseases as well as able to reduce the government spendings on public health.

To develop those interventions, it is essential for the scientists to understand the underlying causes of neuroticism. For a long time, scientists believed that personality is, solely, a product of genes. The role of genotype in neuroticism has been extensively investigated. Particular attention was paid to a polymorphism of the serotonin transporter gene (5-HTTLPR) as it influences serotonin reuptake from the synapse. Studies using family design, twin design and adoption design have converged on the finding that having two copies of the Short allele of the 5-HTTLPR increases the risk for neuroticism. Because a higher proportion of the female population are carriers of two

short 5-HTTLPR alleles, women generally are more susceptible than men to experience anxiety, depression, and other affective disorders, which are strongly correlated with neuroticism. Additionally, there has been little evidence showing that traumatic childhood experience (e.g., child abuse) is correlated with the development of neuroticism, implying that genetic predisposition plays a significant role in shaping personality trait in one's earlier life. However, the understanding of the genetic factors is insufficient in explaining the stability of neuroticism. Psychologists found that the heritability of which decreases with time. As neuroticism is a highly stable personality trait, other factors, like the environment in which an individual lives in, likely play a role in maintaining it. For example, the neurotic individuals either consciously or unconsciously select environment that they want to be in, and the impact of those variations in their selected environment accumulate over time. Or the neurotic individuals end up being isolated from others because of their tendencies to respond negatively to life events. These kinds of selection happens most frequently between the age of 15 to 20, which lead the individual to frequently change their social interactions but similarly negative social environment. Along with the heritability of neuroticism, this kind of experimenting then declines with age, resulting in a stable environment by choice or by lack thereof, which eventually takes over the role from genotype in sustaining one's personality characteristics, in this case, the



person continues to be high in neuroticism.

The research into the formation of neuroticism as well as its causal link with individual's future is still ongoing. It is worth keeping in mind that possessing such personality is not destiny. As more research on this personality identifies the influence of factors other than biological ones, there will be an increase in the effectiveness of the treatment for the mental disorders associated with it, as well as the potential of preventing the adverse outcomes.

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Book Reviews

Psychology in the Classroom Podcast Take Over Review

By Harriet Ennis

This is the link to Lucinda Powell's Psychology in the Classroom podcasts on Spotify or alternatively Apple or Amazon versions (actually I think there are even more options!). They are a wonderful resource and free to enjoy.

Useful Podcast Topics range, more recently, from Cognitive Load, Interleaving, Metacognition and Retrieval Practise to all sorts of other topics like Dancing, Aphantasia and Cannabis in the Classroom. What could be more useful than, for example, podcasts on Motivation or Exam Preparation and the teenage brain?

I have reviewed Lucinda's podcasts for the ATP Today before, this time I want to remind you about this growing resource - a mine of interesting psychology in podcast form AND tell you, if you don't know, about a great opportunity for you and/or your students to take part in podcasting themselves!

Lucinda offers teachers and students the opportunity to present their own short podcasts and 'TAKE OVER' in the holidays. Some of my Psychology students have recorded 5 minute podcasts in the last two Christmas holidays running, on topics of their choice, in Lucinda's Christmas Takeover.

As a teacher I enjoyed podcasting on Motivation, as a full length podcast interview with Lucinda. However, for this year's Christmas Takeover I also recorded a short takeover podcast introducing self-hypnosis, with a free self-hypnosis recording as a treat for anyone who wants to learn the skill. This might also be useful to students entering exam season, as it

can be used to help get to sleep. Of course Sleep is another handy topic covered in Lucinda's podcasts.

How to Podcast: Recording on your phone is really simple:

You or your students can record an MP4 and Lucinda will top and tail the recording with the podcast intro. It could not really be simpler or quicker.

The outcome is something students can feel very proud of and looks great on the UCAS form or CV.

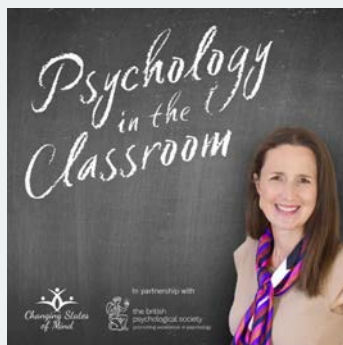
I would like to recommend these students' podcasts as examples to you and your students and to encourage them to record their own:

This year James Booth (Year 12 Bootham School) recorded his 'Real of Fake' research he had generated as his first activity for me as an A level student. See if you can tell the difference between the real and the fake research?

Effie-Dodds Aston (Year 12 Bootham School) carried out some of her own research into the use of songs to stimulate memories for her grandfather with dementia and shares her personal experience.

One of my favourites from the previous year's Christmas Takeover was recorded by Libby Tomlinson who podcasted about learning how to meditate to help her cope with stress in lock-down. I like this one because it is accessible and encouraging to other young people who might consider learning this valuable life skill.

This is the information put together by Lucinda to share with your students on how to make their podcast.



Use the QR code to access this article and links to the podcasts online.



If this is something you or your students want to do you can email me harriet.ennis@boothamschool.com for further advice or get in touch with Lucinda.

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Anyone can write for the ATP Today magazine. We particularly welcome articles from teachers, students, researchers, university departments, university lecturers and PGCE students.

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Yes. We welcome photos to be included in our articles. If you want to submit them (once you have checked copyright) please attach them in your email separately and do not embed them within the article. All photos need to be taken in the highest resolution setting possible and in jpeg format.

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