

Brain Spring Newsletter

May 2023, Volume 3, Issue 1

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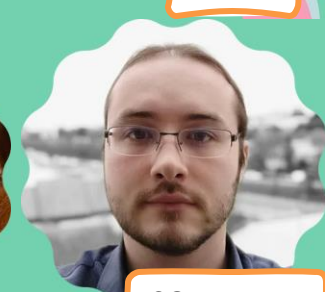
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Dear reader,

We are so excited to share our seventh edition of the eBRAIN newsletter with you! We hope to share the good news of our study extension, Svenja's work in Singapore and an insightful piece from our parent champion. We want to introduce Nare, our new research assistant, as well as our new study CELEBRATE and hope you will get involved! We also give you a farewell message from Maryam and discuss our visit to Lanfranc Academy for Careers Day. You can also learn about the neuroscience of consciousness and try our brain-themed crossword! As you know, the focus of eBRAIN is mental wellbeing for everyone, so make sure you look after your physical and mental wellbeing during these times, practicing kindness to yourself and others.

Well wishes and solidarity, wherever you may be.

The e-BRAIN team

Introducing our new study, CELEBRATE!

We have recently began working on a **brand new study**, related to eBRAIN. The new study is called **CELEBRATE** (*Co-producing a framework of guiding principles for engaging representative and diverse cohorts of young people in biological research in mental health*).

In **CELEBRATE** we are working with young people to understand how we can do **better biological research in mental health** in young people (like the eBRAIN study) in the future.

Lots of researchers are interested in how our **biology is linked to our mental health** so the **CELEBRATE study aims to create unbiased guidance for researchers on how best to study this**. Lots of researchers want to investigate this topic, and it is important we do it in the best possible way!

This is why we started the eBRAIN project, to better understand how our life experiences might impact on our brain development and mental health.



We want to hear from young people on how they think researchers should do their projects with people of your age.

We established the **YEWG (Youth Expert Working Group)**, a group of **young people** (some of which are from our eBRAIN study!) with an interest in **biological and mental health research** to have as much young people's involvement as possible!

The CELEBRATE study will involve separate strands of work, which consist of meetings, focus groups and workshops for young people in London, Birmingham and Bradford.

The results will tell us what is important for young people when taking part in research like eBRAIN, or what might prevent them from taking part in this type of study.

If this project interests you and you would like to be involved, please email Becky (Rebecca.pollard@kcl.ac.uk) to find out more!



Follow the CELEBRATE study on Twitter ([@ProjCelebrate](https://twitter.com/ProjCelebrate)) and Instagram ([@celebrateprojectofficial](https://www.instagram.com/celebrateprojectofficial)).



eBRAIN Study has been awarded an extension!



Medical
Research
Council

The eBRAIN study is very lucky to be funded by the **Medical Research Council (MRC)** which is an organisation that funds research at the forefront of science to prevent illness, develop therapies and improve human health.

Without funding from organisations like the MRC, studies like eBRAIN wouldn't happen, and researchers like us wouldn't be able to conduct investigations that might help prevent health problems or improve treatment.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the progress of eBRAIN was delayed. No one was able to come and see us for study visits, so we couldn't do any data collection at all for many months! We are now making excellent progress and have recruited all **230 participants**, but we needed a little extra funding to allow us to continue completing everyone's follow up visits!

We are very happy to confirm that the MRC has granted us some more funding to continue the study until October 2024! This means we can invite everyone back for their follow up visits.

This will allow us to understand how young peoples' life experiences might affect their development and mental wellbeing over a long time period – a very important question!

Our Parent Champion, Katarzyna, shares her different contributions to eBRAIN

My name is Katarzyna and I am a **Senior Research Funding Associate** at King's College London's Research Grants Department.

I'm also the **mother** of **13-year-old Paulina** who takes part in the **eBRAIN** study.

As a King's professional staff member, I had the great opportunity to assist Prof. Paola Dazzan with the **financial and admin** side of things when she was submitting the grant application for this project to the MRC. After receiving the funding award, now I am involved in this amazing study as a **parent supporting my daughter actively taking part in the research**, but also as a **mother sharing my own life experiences and mental health journey** with the researchers. Therefore, I had the chance to observe the study from three different perspectives.

I found the experience **very interesting**, and it is a **great honour** to be part of such exciting research designed to better understand the mental health of young people.

I **highly recommend** being a **volunteer** in **research studies** – it is interesting, enjoyable and helps advance the science!

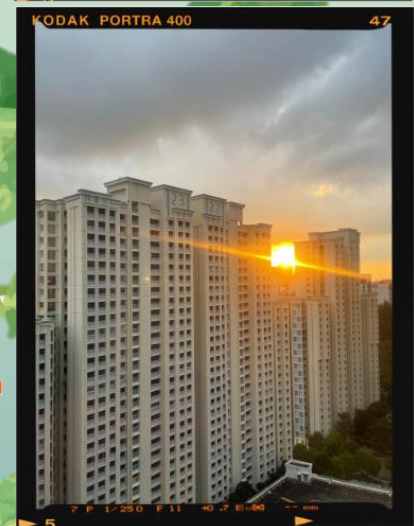


Our PhD student Svenja tells us about her research collaboration in Singapore

In January, I took off to Singapore to start my **attachment** at the **research institute A*STAR**. In my PhD, I combine data from **eBRAIN participants** with data collected from **children and young adolescents in Singapore**. This allows me to explore similarities and differences between adolescents living in two distinct cultural contexts.



It was hard for me to say goodbye to eBRAIN, as it has become an integral part of my life, to leave an amazing team of colleagues that have become friends, and friends that have become family in London. At the same time, breaking entirely new ground is very exciting and I am still overwhelmed by the warm welcome I have received in Singapore. I am now settling down and can really say that **Singapore is a vibrant hub of culture and creativity**.



Living in Singapore's **diverse cultural landscape** has been **incredibly enriching for me**. The Singaporean population comes mainly from China, Malaysia, and India, but also from all around the world – all identifying as Singaporeans. And Singaporeans do know how to enjoy themselves: from beach days, cycling and hiking in the jungle, karaoke, loads of museums, to various water sports (which I have not tried YET). There are countless activities to fill the weekends. Also, I am integrating into a new and diverse community of researchers here, **gaining new perspectives, exchanging ideas, and ultimately widening my understanding** of adolescent mental health.

Lastly, let me say that I'll be back next year and my work with eBRAIN is only in standby mode – I hope to see many of you in 2024!



The Neuroscience of Consciousness

What is consciousness?

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Psychology (2001), consciousness is "**The normal mental condition of the waking state of humans, characterised by the experience of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, awareness of the external world, and often in humans self-awareness.**"



The role of consciousness in psychology

Psychology began in the late 1800s as the study of the **conscious mind**. However, it was argued that **consciousness is an internal, private experience that researchers cannot observe or measure**. Therefore, psychologists redefined their field as the **study of behaviour**.

Scientists have gone even further, suggesting that **consciousness does not even exist**. Others have made the point that consciousness does not help us explain behaviour. But that misses the point. Consciousness is not something that psychologists invented to explain behaviour. It is the thing we are trying to explain.

In a universe composed of matter and energy, **why is there such a thing as consciousness?**



Where is consciousness located?

The **cerebral cortex**, which is the outer surface of the brain, contains regions thought to be essential to the experience of consciousness. The **thalamus**, located in the middle of the brain, has likewise been thought to be related to consciousness. In particular, the **interaction** between the thalamus and cortical regions, called the **thalamocortical loop**, is considered important for consciousness. However, researchers are still working towards identifying the real place of consciousness!

Inner section of the brain

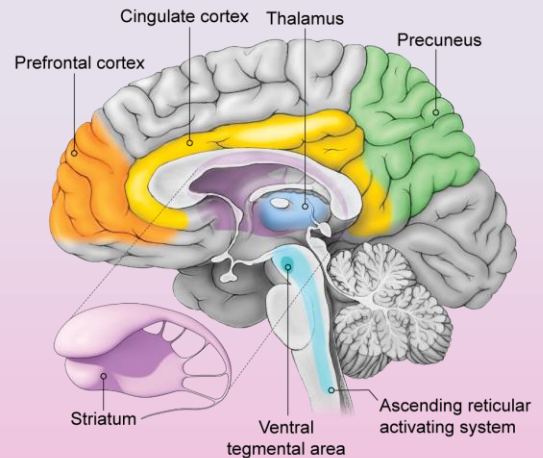


Image credit: Falconieri Visuals

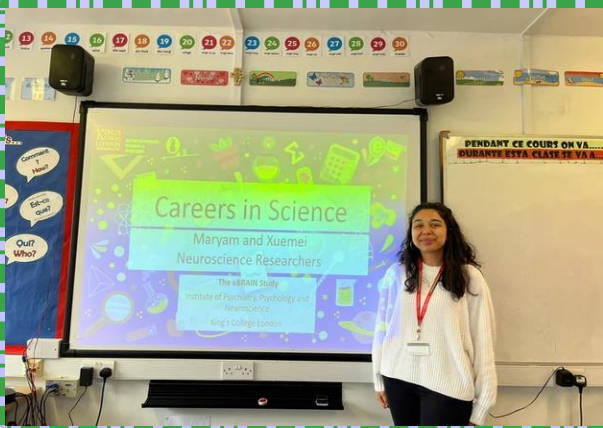
What is its purpose?

One theory is that conscious thought is a way of rehearsing possibilities for future actions. After you do something, you might ponder 'That didn't go well, what could I have done differently?' In that way, your conscious thinking changes your behaviour in future occasions. That sort of process only occurs when we think about something consciously. Still the question remains, **does behaviour depend on consciousness?**

Many theorists seem to see the role of consciousness as an either-or question. Either consciousness is useless or it evolved to serve a special purpose.



Goodbye to our amazing research assistant, Maryam



Working at the **Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience (IoPPN)** as a Research Assistant on the eBRAIN Study for the last 2 years has been an **incredible and enriching experience**, to say the least!

King's College London (KCL) holds a special place for me as I completed my 2-year part-time **Neuroscience Master's at the IoPPN** and continued as staff for 2 more years in **the eBRAIN Study**.

This role has been so fulfilling and given me such purpose. My favourite part of the role has always been **speaking to all of the young people involved with the study!**

Whether you're a participant, a work experience student or have attended one of our school presentations or workshops, learning about **your experiences and perspectives has been invaluable to me**. Seeing the real-time positive impact of our study and knowing the next generation might be better equipped when it comes to their mental wellbeing has been very reassuring.

[Being the Change You Want to See - Growing Together for Children's Mental Health Week](#) by **Maryam Matter**



I have also been encouraged to learn new skills. I am now **phlebotomy trained**, which is something I didn't imagine myself doing before this role! I am grateful for all the **opportunities that have been available to me** during my time at KCL and being able to give back to both the IoPPN and KCL communities.

I have been able to grow in so many ways, both personally and professionally within such a **safe, positively challenging and collaborative environment**. This allowed me to share my struggles openly, without fear of judgment, and to learn from my colleagues and supervisor.



Thank you so much eBRAIN team and the wider team, the Section of Imaging and Neurobiology of Psychosis Lab, for such a phenomenal first role within academia. I've been so lucky to be a part of such an **amazing and supportive team**; I am going to miss you all dearly! ♥

If you want to find out what's next for me or have any questions, [you can connect with or follow me on LinkedIn](#) - I am always happy to have a chat :) feel free to reach out.



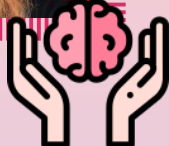
Meet our new team member, Nare!

Nare is working as a **Research Assistant** in the eBRAIN study, here at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience at King's College London.

Welcome to the team, Nare!



Hi, I'm Nare and I joined the e-BRAIN team a few months ago. I'm really excited to be working on this project related to **how life experiences** might **influence our biology and mental wellbeing**. Plus, everyone has been very kind and welcoming!



So far, I have been exposed to different aspects of the study and I find it really helpful to understand more about the wellbeing side of the project. More specifically, I have been **assisting with the biosample collection and processing**, as well as **helping with the interviews**. I've **really enjoyed meeting the participants and their families**, in particular listening to the different experiences of each participant relating to their mood and mental health. I would love to continue to learn more and maybe even analyse some of the data and **become a better researcher**.

I studied **Biomedical Sciences** with Professional Experience at **Brunel University London** for my undergraduate degree. During my placement year, I became interested in mental health after studying how genetic make up can influence how people with a diagnosis of autism respond to treatment. I then completed my **Master's in Psychiatric Research** at **King's College London**, as I wanted to learn more about mental health disorders. In the long term, I hope to apply my knowledge **to better understand mental health conditions** and **develop better treatment** for people with these conditions.



In my spare time, I love **watching movies** and listening to reviews and video essays about film. I'm also **passionate about different languages**. I'm bilingual as I speak both English and Armenian and help teach the Armenian alphabet to children on Sundays. I learnt Spanish at school and was able to practice it during my placement in Spain. I want to continue to maintain this skill and become more fluent.



Careers Day at Archbishop Lanfranc Academy

In December we visited **Lanfranc Academy** in Croydon for a career's day. Some students even recognised us from last time and came to say hello!



We gave the students an insight into what our jobs involve as researchers on the eBRAIN study and what a future career in Psychology & Neuroscience might look like. It was great to see how fascinated the students were with the brain and how passionate they felt about mental health.

We asked them '**What change would you like to see most within the area of young people's mental health?**' Some of the contributions were: '**less judgment and stigma**' and '**more access to support in schools**'. As part of our research, we hope to improve these problems by promoting the importance of adolescent mental health awareness.

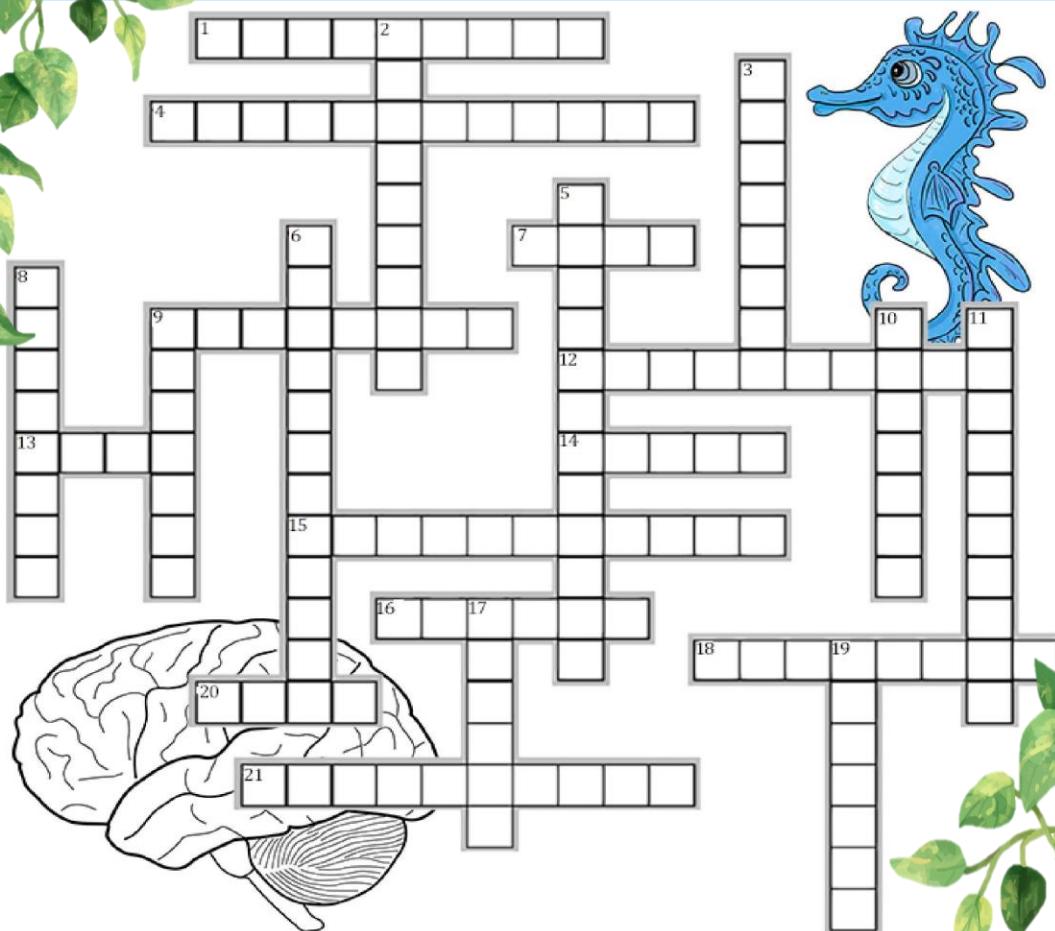


The brain sweets went down a treat!

Would you like your school to do something different to help young people's mental wellbeing?



Brain-themed Crossword



ACROSS

1. lobe of brain associated with vision
4. fissure that separates the hemispheres
7. ridges on the cerebral cortex
9. large part of brain, consists of two hemispheres
12. fissure that separates the occipital lobe from cerebellum
13. Outermost meninges, ___ mater.
14. white matter within the cerebellum; ___ vitae
15. the "seahorse" of the brain; functions in memory
16. a groove between two gyri
18. connects the two hemispheres; corpus _____
20. relay station within the brain stem above medulla
21. fluid filled cavities within the brain

DOWN

2. gland attached to the hypothalamus
3. membranes around the brain
5. links the brain to the endocrine system (pituitary)
6. consists of the thalamus and hypothalamus
8. associated with fear and aggression
9. where the two optic nerves cross
10. the most anterior lobe of the brain
11. part of the brain responsible for balance
17. system that contains the hypothalamus, hippocampus, amygdala
19. fissure that separates temporal lobe from the parietal lobe

Give this crossword a go and find out more about our brain and the nervous system!

Find the answers on the last page of the newsletter!

How many answers will you guess?



Dear reader,

Thank you for reading our newsletter. We hope you enjoyed it! If you'd like to get involved, find out more or have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch! You can find all of our contact details and social media accounts below. We look forward to hearing from you!

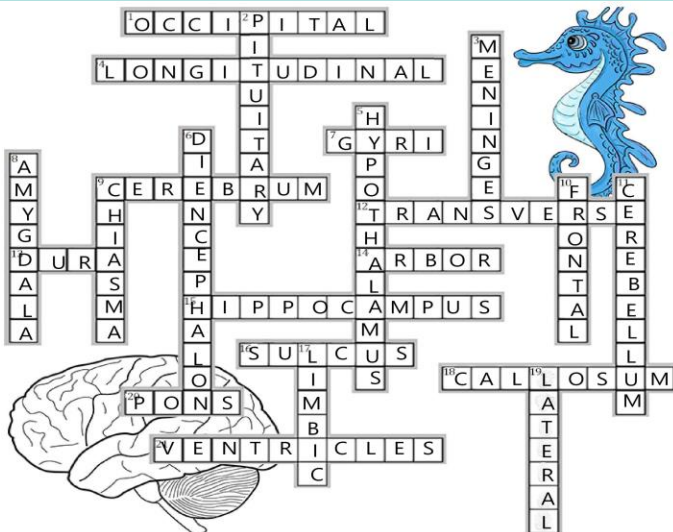
The e-BRAIN team




This newsletter was created by Michelle Cramp with help from the eBRAIN team!





IoPPN Christmas Party – December 2022




If you missed our last newsletter or would like to view any of our previous newsletters, you can find them here: <https://www.ebrainstudy.com/blog>

 ebrain@kcl.ac.uk

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