

Brain

Autumn Newsletter

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Dear reader,

We are so excited to share our fifth edition of the eBRAIN newsletter with you! We hope it will give you an idea of what we've enjoyed most since things have opened up again, an update on what we have been up to, the strengths of our participants and the importance of doing a longitudinal study! We also wanted to introduce Svenja, our new team member, share Nuria's reflections on her time with eBRAIN as she moves to a new job, and bring you testimonials from our Teacher and Student Champions. 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

What have we been up to since things opened up?

ALICE

I enjoy exercises, **all sorts of exercises**, brain and physical ones alike. In my leisure time, I am **learning Japanese**, taking **English Classics Appreciation classes** online (we are halfway through Hamlet for now), **writing novels** (one recurrent theme of them is existential crisis), **doing yoga**, and **practicing Taekwondo**.

BECKY

The thing I have **most** enjoyed now that we are returning to normal and out of lockdown is **returning to playing sport again!** Sport is normally a huge part of my life and I spend a lot of my week training and playing matches. I play **Korfball**, which is an indoor sport and so we weren't allowed to continue at all during the pandemic. It has been so nice to get back into it and **practice and play with old and new friends** over the last few months. After missing it so much over the last year and a bit, **I will never complain about a difficult training session ever again!**



HRITIKA

Lockdown for many of us has meant that we have not been able to meet our family and friends, so I think I speak for most of us when I say that **being able to freely meet loved ones again** has been the best thing about lockdown ending. Personally, I feel very lucky as I have been **able to celebrate Hindu festivities** such as **Navratri and Diwali** with all my family again which was not possible last year. Post lockdown I've been able to **really cherish these moments** even more than before.

PAOLA

Since things have opened up, I have been really happy to being able to **travel and go to see my family!** I really missed them during the last lockdown and with the travel restrictions. It has been **wonderful to spend time with them again**, a present for my summer.



What have we been up to since things opened up?

When things opened up, it seemed that the world could never go back to the pre-COVID time. Just like most people, I have **mixed feelings about the post-COVID new life**.

On one hand, I felt **excited to see my colleagues** in person, who I haven't met for almost one and half years. It's also very enjoyable for me to **to start travelling around the UK with my friends**, and seeing so many fantastic things that encourage me to **treasure every moment in life**, including Hastings' sunshine, York's architecture, Canterbury's river, West Kirby's beach and Edinburgh's history.

On the other hand, I felt **anxious as I didn't know if I could adapt to the new daily routine** after working from home for such a long time. As it's my 3rd year of PhD, which will be very important and busy for me, I have to adapt very quickly to deal with multiple tasks, including lab training, data analysis, paper writing and participants' visits. I want to **keep positive and energetic!** First, I try to **get up early** to have a fresh and efficient day. Secondly, **I keep a regular and healthy diet** which will be good for my heart and brain, as well as digestion. Third, **I listen to light music** when I feel anxious or distracted, which helps me to relax and focus. Lastly, I sometimes **motivate myself to join in social activities with friends and colleagues**, which is a good start to adjust to in-person life.

XUEMEI



SVENJA

Since the situation has eased a bit, I am so grateful for **seeing friends again** and for being able to **interact with different people**. Last week, I spent a beautiful Sunday. I got the best of both worlds: in the morning, I enjoyed some me-time in the **gym** and spent the rest of the day with my **housemates and a friend**. We made an **amazing brunch** and went to the **Columbia Road flower market**. We went there shortly before the stalls closed and got some great deals! New plants and flowers always make me incredibly happy. Then, we went on a **bike tour through Victoria Park**, and I discovered that I love the vibe there. We ended our little trip in a pub garden and biked home **feeling refreshed and wholesome**.

NURIA

Emerging from lockdown, I enjoyed most **being able to go climbing again**. It was such a great feeling to **get on the wall again** when the climbing gyms reopened. I had lost all of my muscles, finger strength and technique, but so had everyone else at the gym. Having sore muscles after the first climbing session was the **worst and best feeling ever!**



MARYAM

My favourite thing that I've been able to do since lockdown lifted was seeing my friends, **making new memories**, having the opportunity to **celebrate my birthday** with my loved ones and going on my **first night out** in 2 years! It was so nice just letting go and having a great time with my friends.



Becky takes us through our participants' strengths!

One of our favourite parts of each study visit is when we ask our participants to tell us about their strengths and good points. We love hearing everything about your hobbies and interests, as they are all so varied! **All young people have unique strengths, with some being super sporty, others artistic and creative, or maybe great with friends!**

ARE YOU GOOD AT DRAMA OR ACTING?

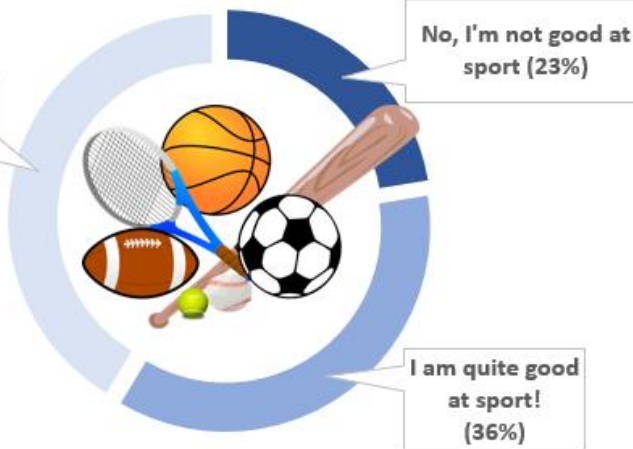
It's really important for our self-esteem and mental wellbeing that we take time to nurture our hobbies and things that we are good at.

Our eBRAIN participants have so many different talents! **Over 50%** said they are very good at **drama and acting** – maybe we have some **future Oscar winners** within our group!



ARE YOU GOOD AT SPORT?

I'm very good at sport!
(41%)



41% of our participants say they are **super sporty**, and really good at running, jumping and playing a whole range of different sports; from gymnastics to martial arts to rugby – **we have met athletes from so many different areas!**

ARE YOU GOOD WITH COMPUTERS?

A whole **40%** of our participants have told us that they are **really good with computers!** Hopefully in the future, some of you will want to **become scientists** like us and use your computer skills to **help answer all sorts of science questions!**



And lastly, a **huge number** of our participants **tell us really nice things about themselves**, how they are **polite, good with friends** and have a **nice personality**. We have to say that having met over 115 of you (!!!) **we could not agree more, and it has been a pleasure getting to know you all!**

Nuria on leaving the eBRAIN Study



In this piece, **Nuria reflects on her time with eBRAIN** as she will be venturing into a new role in 2022!

We are so excited to see what Nuria does in her next career step and **we wish her the best of luck!** ♥

What have I learned as a member of the eBRAIN team in the last one and a half years?

First and foremost, I've learned how great it is to **spend your work time doing something you love** and feel passionate about and **knowing that your team shares that feeling.**

At eBRAIN, we want to find out how early experiences shape the way our brain develops.

During the last one and a half years, I helped find out **how the environment can influence brain development.** Our study participants have a brain scan in a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanner. Those scans can reveal what the **brain looks like.** Also, by looking at how blood flows in the brain while doing something or simply resting, they tell us something about how it works. As an **Image Analyst,** I was responsible for the analyses of **these brain scans,** making sure that the picture quality was good and organising them for our study team.



I learned a lot of technical things, for example what to do if a participant moves their head in the scanner. **I love statistics and data science,** so this is something I can happily spend days researching about! **As a psychologist,** I am also interested in **how we can capture thoughts and feelings** outside of the MRI scanner, things like **happiness, resilience, worries, difficulties, unusual experiences.**

I've learned a lot about how by listening about our participants' behaviours and thoughts we can find out more about the mechanisms that are common to us all while also trying to bear in mind that we are all different. But beyond statistical knowledge and new psychological methods, most importantly, **I've learned how great it is to share your enthusiasm** with your team and to overcome difficulties by working together. **Thank you, to all eBRAIN team members and to all our participants for helping with this research!**



Alice tells us about longitudinal studies and why they are important!

Researchers are driven by the **desire to know**. They have come up with different ways to **gain knowledge of different aspects**. Take health researchers for example, factors that impact on the development, progression, and recovery of health conditions, are of greatest interest, as they are **essential to help inform health practitioners** about the best treatments! To achieve this, researchers would often do what is called a **prospective longitudinal study**.

WHAT IS A PROSPECTIVE LONGITUDINAL STUDY, AND WHY IS IT HELPFUL?

This is a special kind of study where a **group of people are seen by the researchers several times, over a certain period of time**. In this way, researchers can find out if there are **changes happening over time**, and even see if there is something they see at the beginning that can predict how health will be in the future!



For instance, if we want to know how well somebody sleeps as a child influences how well they do at school later on in life, we can design a prospective longitudinal study by inviting a group of young toddlers and ask them about their sleeping habits. We can then **ask them the same questions** every year, until they reach the age of year 6 for example. In doing so, we understand **if and how early year sleeping habits affect year 6 school performance** - our primary goal. In addition, we can also find out if other things, like their environment or their lifestyle are linked to sleeping habits or even school performance. **These findings might be worthy of further investigations!**

As you might have already guessed, our **eBRAIN study is exactly designed this way!** So, thank you again for your enormous help, with which **we are now getting closer to learn more about what contributes to good mental health and resilience in young people like you!**

Meet our new team member and PhD Student, Svenja!

Svenja recently joined the eBRAIN team and we are so happy to have her with us!

Hey, I'm Svenja and I joined e-BRAIN for my PhD in October. I am very excited to become part of **such a lovely team that made me feel welcome right from the start!**

I have been working in research and education and just completed a **Master in Clinical Psychology at the University of Cologne**. During my undergraduate studies at Maastricht University, I discovered my **passion for studying the human brain**. To relax, I do **yoga, go to the gym, or ride my bike**. I love to be out and about, go dancing a lot and consider myself a feminist.



I have a true passion for **both neuroscience and clinical psychology**. So, here I am! The e-BRAIN project is a **huge opportunity** for me to combine my interests and develop as a researcher. Plus, I am deeply convinced that **the study is essential to work towards improving adolescent mental health**.



My PhD project is about **researching why some young people experience mood changes as their brains mature through puberty**. Most adult mental health problems become apparent in these young years. Therefore, it is crucial to figure out what is happening in the brain during puberty and **how this might be affected by the environment**. I can't wait to delve deeper into this and to participate in the project!

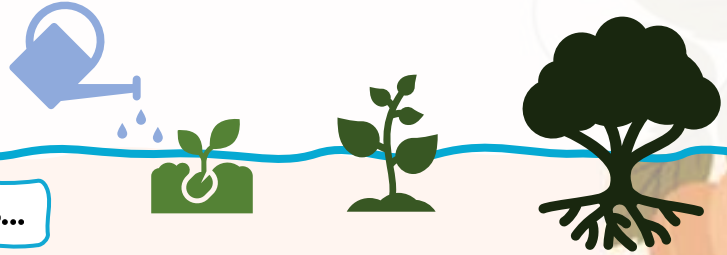
Our Teacher and Student Champions say...!

OUR TEACHER CHAMPION, MR. ARTHUR, SAYS...

Working with eBrain has allowed the school the opportunity to further **give an insight to students on the importance of a growth mind-set**. The students have had the opportunity to work with staff and **discuss anxiety** and the eBrain study itself, this allowed our students to be participants and **further explore their growing interests**.

The staff we have worked with **have been incredible** and **Canary Wharf College Crossharbour** hope to continue this link and **further collaborate** on other research and project opportunities.

Mr. Arthur
Deputy Head Teacher



OUR STUDENT CHAMPION, EVA, SAYS...

eBRAIN has been a great experience and one that **I was always looking forward to** whilst taking part. At first, I was nervous (especially for the blood test) but I realised that **there wasn't really a need to be nervous**. Everyone was **so kind and welcoming**, and during the interviews I was even given snacks! I am so glad that I took the chance to take part in this research as I have **learnt so much** and **had loads of fun**. If I had another opportunity to do this again, **I would take it instantly!**

What else have we been up to?



In October, we attended the **Reach Study Festival for young people** in Brixton, an incredible event with lots of great workshops! We also had some **spooky Halloween fun** during our study visits with lots of sweets for those who saw us over October half term. In November, we had a **wonderful Italian team lunch** with the Stress, Psychiatry and Immunology Lab group and the Section of Imaging and Neurobiology in Psychosis team. We also **celebrated some birthdays** in the office and ate lots of delicious cake!



Dear reader,

Thank you for reading our Newsletter. We hope you enjoyed it!

We wanted to take this opportunity to say thank you so much for being involved with the eBRAIN study! Wishing you all a very happy holiday, have a lovely break and take care of yourselves. We'll see you in the new year!

If you'd like to get involved with the study, find out more or ask any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch! You can find our contact details and social media accounts below. We look forward to hearing from you! Bye for now!

The e-BRAIN team

This newsletter was created by Maryam Matter with lots of help from the eBRAIN team!


Happy Holidays 


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

Want more? Why not check out our [website](#) for more eBRAIN content, including blogs, mental health resources, challenges and more! ☺


Acknowledgements for previous newsletters:


- Update on the study – where are we now? - Becky
- Which brain areas are active when we think about others' feelings? - Nuria
- The average eBRAIN participant! - Xuemei
- Why is the eBRAIN study important, what does the literature say? - Hritika
- The secrets in blood, saliva and urine! - Xuemei



 ebrain@kcl.ac.uk

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