

Spotlight on postgraduates

SINCE the vast majority of postgraduates are studying for degrees by research, one of the important organisations that exists to support research is the Psychology Postgraduate Affairs Group. PsyPAG has been in existence since the late 1960s, when a group of Sheffield postgraduates got together to organise a conference aimed at postgraduates. It is now a national organisation that aims to support all aspects of postgraduate work.

PsyPAG is effectively the postgraduate wing of the Society, run on a voluntary basis by postgraduates. Anyone studying a psychology-related PhD or master's degree is eligible to be voted on to the committee. Many people have the opportunity to become actively involved:

BY CHRIS BEARMAN

membership of the committee is constantly changing as people complete their PhDs.

PsyPAG represents postgraduate interests within the BPS through postgraduate representatives on the Research Board, Membership and Professional Training Board, and within each of the Divisions, Sections and Branches. PsyPAG also has a representative in the Learning Teaching and Support Network and has recently made several presentations to them on postgraduate views (e.g. Atherton *et al.*, 2002). PsyPAG has also conducted research on postgraduate experiences of their PhDs (Hatton, 1994) and has collaborated with

the Society's Research Board to produce documents such as the *So You Want to Do a PhD* booklet (available from the Society) and the 'How to... Apply for a PhD' article (*The Psychologist*, July 2002).

Every year PsyPAG holds a conference at a UK university. In addition to providing an ideal setting for postgraduates to present their work to a friendly audience, the conference is also an opportunity to meet and form friendships with other postgraduates. Studying for a higher degree can be a very isolating experience at times, particularly if there are only a few postgraduates in the department. The opportunity to talk to other postgraduates who may have experienced similar problems can often help.

Another way that PsyPAG seeks to

Work in progress...postgraduate work in progress...postgraduate work in progress...

Visualising expertise (ESRC/NERC)

Susan Howard (Department of Social Psychology, London School of Economics. E-mail: S.Howard@lse.ac.uk). Supervisor: Martin Bauer.

How does the non-scientific public 'visualise' scientists, and how has the stereotype of the scientist changed in Britain from post-Second World War to the 1990s? I shall be looking at mass-media images of scientists spanning the period. I have a particular interest in images of psychologists, perhaps garnered from this very magazine...

Numeracy skills in children with nonverbal learning difficulties (ESRC)

Marianne Durand (Department of Psychology, University of York. E-mail: md139@york.ac.uk). Co-supervisors: Maggie Snowling

and Charles Hulme.

I am assessing the cognitive deficits of children with NLD who have strengths in reading and vocabulary, and weaker nonverbal, visuospatial and mathematical skills. The current phase investigates aspects of mathematics that pose problems for people with NLD; for example, arithmetic facts, judgements of quantity and size and associated deficits in memory and attention processes.

Brief interventions for problem drinkers (ESRC/NERC)

Lee Hogan (School of Psychology, University of Wales Bangor. E-mail: pspa24@bangor.ac.uk)

Supervisor: W. Miles Cox. My thesis will compare the effectiveness of two motivational interventions

aimed at reducing excessive alcohol consumption in general hospitals. The 'standard' intervention motivates patients by providing them with personalised feedback about the current and potential adverse consequences of their excessive drinking. The 'enhanced' intervention provides the patient with additional personal feedback about general motivational patterns that are interfering with their achieving a fulfilling lifestyle, and provides guidelines for improving motivation.

Task interruption and problem solving (ESRC)

Helen Hodgetts (School of Psychology, Cardiff University. E-mail: HodgettsHM@cardiff.ac.uk). Supervisor: Dylan Jones.

I aim to analyse the effects of mid-task interruption on performance on a spatial problem-solving task. At a theoretical level this addresses how humans cope with interference and task switching (both voluntary and involuntary) and has implications for

understanding how problem-solving goals are represented. Factors found to reduce the cost of interruption can be used in the design of complex task environments such as the flightdeck.

Attitudes towards peace operations (ESRC/NERC)

Christina Clark (Psychology Department, University of Surrey. E-mail: c.glaser@surrey.ac.uk). Supervisor: Chris Fife-Shaw. Despite the armed forces' increasing emphasis on peace operations, little is known about public attitudes or those of the people involved, principally the soldiers. Using longitudinal data, a revised hierarchical model of political attitudes is tested on political topics, such as Britain's interventions in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan and the European Rapid Reaction Force.

Changing transport choices (ESRC/NERC)

Eleanor Mann (Social Psychology, University of Sussex. E-mail: e.mann@sussex.ac.uk).

If you would like your recently funded research to feature in this column, contact Lisa Morrison on lismor@bps.org.uk with the funding body, amount awarded, period of funding, title, contact details and a clear summary of the project in under 50 words.

create a social support network is through the magazine. *PsyPAG Quarterly* is delivered to every psychology department in the UK and contains reviews of conferences, articles on particular areas of psychology, department reviews and humorous pieces. While the *Quarterly* is designed to be a bit of light coffee-time reading it is an important means of establishing a postgraduate community and a way of publicising PsyPAG events (if your department doesn't receive copies then please let us know).

PsyPAG also runs an annual workshop, which is designed to allow postgraduates to develop excellence in the skills of their discipline. The 2001 workshop was held at Loughborough University and was on the topic of discourse, rhetoric and conversation analysis. Led by three experts in the field (Charles Antaki, Derek Edwards and Mike Billig) participants explored and debated key issues in qualitative research in

a hands-on manner. The 2003 workshop will be in the area of psychobiology.

In addition to these activities PsyPAG also awards bursaries to postgraduates to allow them to travel to and present their work at conferences that might otherwise have been financially unattainable. Through this scheme PsyPAG has allowed many postgraduates to present at key conferences, to mix with experts in their field and to become part of respected worldwide academic communities.

So PsyPAG is actively involved in supporting research at the organisational level, with its influence on important committees; at the social level, through the creation of a postgraduate community; and at the practical level, by means of structures that exist to allow postgraduates to present their work, to acquire skills and to become part of important academic communities. For more information on PsyPAG, how to apply for bursaries and how to stand for

committee positions please visit our website at www.psyPag.co.uk.

■ *Chris Bearman is chair of the Psychology Postgraduate Affairs Group. E-mail: chair@psyPag.co.uk.*

References

- Atherton, C., Wan, M.W. & Bearman, C.R. (2002). Research students' expectations of joining the research staff. *Proceedings of The British Psychological Society*, 10(2), 53.
- Hatton, C. (1994). To PhD or not to PhD? The PsyPAG survey. *The Psychologist*, 7, 212-215.

Like all sections of *The Psychologist*, 'Supporting research' depends on your contributions. E-mail Lisa Morrison on lismor@bps.org.uk with your tips, questions, work in progress – anything related to the research process that you think would be of interest to our wide audience.

postgraduate work in progress...postgraduate work in progress...postgraduate w

Supervisor: Charles Abraham. In response to the serious environmental and health impacts of Britain's increasing domestic traffic emissions, we are developing a theory-based model of driving behaviour. We are testing the effects of manipulating control perceptions in relation to getting to work on time without driving. We are developing and evaluating an intervention for use by organisations who want to implement cost-effective, sustainable transport plans.

Why do people (re)turn to alternative medicine? (ESRC CASE Studentship with Boots plc)

Felicity Bishop (Department of Psychology, University of Southampton. E-mail: flb100@soton.ac.uk). Supervisors: Lucy Yardley and George Lewith. What factors promote uptake and continuing use of alternative treatments such as reflexology and homeopathy? The focus is on individuals' beliefs about their health and treatment, and their

experiences of consultations with alternative healthcare practitioners.

Nicotine and dieting as interactive determinants of food choice and cognition (BBSRC)

Lorraine Als (Experimental Psychology, University of Sussex. E-mail: L.C.Als@sussex.ac.uk).

Co-supervisors: Martin Yeomans and Jenny Rusted.

The project will explore the interactive effects of smoking and dieting on appetite control in women, and examine changes in cognition as a consequence of smoking and dieting status. This should give a detailed assessment of the factors that militate against smoking cessation in women who are dieting.

Stress-induced eating (BBSRC)

Terry Dovey (Department of Psychology, University of Liverpool. E-mail: tmdovey@liverpool.ac.uk).

Supervisor: Jason Halford. I am currently working in the

Kissileff lab and in collaboration with Aintree Hospital's clinical endocrinology department. Most individuals will not eat when under stress, but small groups of people such as the obese and restrained eaters will. Why?

Place, identity and bystander intervention (ESRC)

Rachel Manning (Psychology Department, Lancaster University. E-mail: r.manning@lancaster.ac.uk).

Supervisor: Mark Levine. My research aims to add a spatial dimension to the examination of shared group memberships between bystanders, victims and perpetrators of violence. Challenging the proposition (derived from the concept of territoriality) that intervention is more likely 'closer to home', my work suggests that the violent behaviour of ingroup members may be tolerated if it occurs in an exclusively ingroup context. Understanding local power relationships, the harm

caused by and the control exerted over both people and places may aid our understanding of the behaviour of those who witness violence.

The permeability of attentional selection to irrelevant sound (ESRC)

Robert Hughes (School of Psychology, Cardiff University. E-mail: HughesRW@cardiff.ac.uk).

Supervisor: Dylan Jones. The research investigates ways in which irrelevant sound permeates attentional selection and disrupts short-term memory (STM). The first study undertaken supports the notion that one form of disruption occurs as a result of the preattentive seriation (ordering) of auditory events and indicates that this extraneous order information may be inhibited. A second study suggests that auditory input that deviates from a recent pattern of auditory stimulation further disrupts STM, presumably by capturing attention from the primary task.