

Research Theme Event Report: Designed Mind Symposium

Informatics Forum, University of Edinburgh, 8-9 November 2017

This was a two-day event bringing together researchers working on the science of consciousness. We invited contributions from philosophy of mind, evolutionary psychology, neuroscience, and artificial consciousness. There was participation from multiple institutes within Edinburgh Informatics (ANC, ILLC, IPAB), other departments within Edinburgh University (School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences), other universities in the SICSA community, and the wider UK and international research communities.

We had 114 delegates and 13 presentations, plus a public lecture by philosopher Daniel Dennett, which was at full capacity of 180 people.

The symposium was followed by a 1-day workshop Expecting Ourselves: Prediction, Action, and the Embodied Mind, also in the Informatics Forum, which also attracted a multidisciplinary, international audience, and had a presentation by Google Deep Mind.

The event was a huge success with attendance 43% higher than expected, very positive feedback from attendees and an exciting publication in the works with a foreword by one of the leading academics in the field.

Invited speakers

Daniel C. Dennett Tufts University
Michael Graziano Princeton University

Other speakers

François Kammerer ENS, Institut Jean Nicod
Tom McClelland University of Warwick
Enoch Lambert Tufts University
Don Ross University College Cork
Anna Ciaunica Universidade do Porto/University College London
Raphaël Millière University of Oxford
Wolfgang Prinz Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences
Roly Perera University of Edinburgh/University of Glasgow
Axel Cleeremans Université Libre de Bruxelles
Krzysztof Dolega Ruhr Universität Bochum
Wanja Wiese Johannes Gutenberg University
Elmarie Venter Ruhr-Universität Bochum

Organising committee

Programme Chair: Roly Perera (University of Edinburgh/University of Glasgow)

Publication Chairs: Takuya Niikawa (Chiba University)
Max Jones (University of Leeds)

Publicity Chair: Aïda Elamrani-Raoult (ENS, Institut Jean Nicod)

Programme committee

To select the scientific programme we had a 21-strong committee of experts from Scottish, UK and international universities, including several full professors and institute directors.

Michael Anderson	University of Maryland
Andrew Brook	Carleton University
Anna Ciaunica	Universidade do Porto/University College London
Axel Cleeremans	Université Libre de Bruxelles
Zoe Drayson	University of California, Davis
Paula Droege	Penn State University
Eve Isham	University of California, Davis
Rocco J. Gennaro	University of Southern Indiana
Enoch Lambert	Tufts University
Jakub Limanowski	Freie Universität Berlin
Tom McClelland	University of Warwick
Raphaël Millière	University of Oxford
Maria Niedernhuber	University of Cambridge
Stuart Presnell	University of Bristol
Teed Rockwell	Sonoma State University
Don Ross	University College Cork/University of Cape Town
Aaron Schurger	Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Medicale
Mog Stapleton	University of Edinburgh
Sam Wilkinson	University of Edinburgh
Keith Wilson	University of Glasgow
Tadeusz Zawidzki	Columbian College of Arts and Sciences

Budget

Both expenditure and income were higher than estimated because student attendance was more than double our original expectation. The event roughly broke even.

	Projected	Actual
Room hire & servitor cover	300	390
Speaker travel & accommodation	2,589	1,265
Organiser costs	480	895
Catering	4,880	6,477
Promotion	383	130
Speakers' dinner	0	276
Baba Brinkman performance	0	888
Online transaction charges	0	463
TOTAL	8,632	10,783

Income

Registration fees	8,820
SICSA award	1,080
X-Spect project coffee break contribution	372
Sackler Institute student places	270
School of Informatics coffee break contribution	104
Additional Baba Brinkman sales	98
TOTAL	10,744

3 student places were funded by Sackler Institute, Edinburgh. Tea, coffee and cakes for the public lecture guests were provided by School of Informatics and Professor Andy Clark's X-Spect ERC project.

There was a slight shortfall of about £40 of organisers' expenses.

Attendance

	Projected	Actual
Student (including SICSA places)	30	63
Non-student	50	51
TOTAL	80	114

We were able to give complimentary places to 29 people (in addition to guest speakers and organisers) to support those with limited access to travel funds. We also offered discounted rates to two retirees.

SICSA student volunteers

In return for the £1,080 SICSA contribution towards catering costs, we were able to fund 12 student volunteer places (registration fee £90). With the exception of one student from University of St Andrews, volunteers were exclusively taken from School of Informatics, University of Edinburgh, to encourage as much institutional/local involvement as possible.

We had more than 50 applicants for the student places from Informatics alone, showing the huge amount of interest in the event. The 12 volunteers were selected based on research interests, gender, and previous experience. The variety of research interests reflects the diversity of Edinburgh Informatics, which is unique in having such a strong presence in the cognitive sciences and related disciplines.

The students volunteers were:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Research area</i>
Janek Stolarek	Male	Programming languages
Calum Imrie	Male	Robotics
Patric Fulop	Male	AI
Matt Rounds	Male	Bayesian models of attention
Lucy Liu	Female	Computational neuroscience
Remus Pop	Male	AI, consciousness
Martino Sorbaro	Male	Computational neuroscience
Jun Bao	Male	Machine consciousness
Rea Marmarinou	Female	Psycholinguistics
Ekaterina Gorbunova	Female	Cognitive science
Carolin Scholl	Female	Neuroscience of consciousness
Lewis Hammond	Male	(Unknown)

All the student volunteers did a fantastic job and working with them was one of the high points of the conference.

Diversity

Our invited speakers were both white, male, senior academics; we invited the two people most suited to the theme of the conference (not expecting to get them both). In future we would take care to select more diverse invited speakers.

For the other aspects of the conference, there was more of a gender mix:

Paper presentations	17% female
Programme committee	29% female
Session chairs	38% female
Student volunteers	33% female

Paper presentation were based on double-blind reviewing so we had no control over gender; for the PC, session chairs and student volunteers we were able to make explicit

choices. Of course there are other diversity issues beyond gender but we considered those out of scope for this event.

Research output

We accepted 13 papers for presentation at the conference out of 45 submissions.

We have nearly finalised arrangements for a special issue of *Journal of Consciousness Studies* (currently ranked #16 in Google Scholar philosophy journals worldwide), which will feature about 10 of the accepted papers plus an invited paper by Michael Graziano, and a foreword by Daniel Dennett. The volume will be published in the first half of 2019.

Other event highlights

- The keynote by Daniel Dennett was open to the public. The 69 available places were sold out within a couple of hours. Dennett was introduced by Professor Andy Clark of University of Edinburgh.
- 4 sixth-form students and 2 teachers from George Watson's College, Edinburgh were able to attend the public lecture at our invitation.
- There was a performance by Canadian rap artist Baba Brinkman of his acclaimed album *The Rap Guide to Consciousness*, following by a Q&A session with Anil Seth, Professor of Neuroscience at Sussex University. This event was also open to the public.
- There were journalists in attendance from [Aeon magazine](#) and *Scientific American*.

By all accounts, the event was very rewarding for all involved and we look forward to organising a follow-up event, most likely in 2019.