3 Year PhD Studentship available for September 2019

**Department:** Neuroscience, Psychology and Behaviour

**Supervisors:** Dr Annemieke Apergis-Schoute [ams113@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:ams113@leicester.ac.uk)

**Eligibility:** This studentship is open to UK and EU applicants only.

**Project Title:** The role of preoccupation in anxiety related disorders

**Project Description:** Patients with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) suffer from persistent intrusive thoughts (obSESSIONS) and an urge to perform repetitive behaviours (compulsions) aimed at alleviating stress and anxiety. Obsessions can be thought of as a form of unhealthy “preoccupation”, which plays a key role not only in OCD, but also often in depression, anxiety and eating-related disorders.

The ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC) is crucial for effective valuation of important stimuli and our research has shown deficits in vmPFC functioning, specifically in regards to valuation in patients with OCD (Apergis-Schoute et al., 2017, 2018). This ultimately contributes to impaired performance on tasks that rely on external valuation. We hypothesize that specific preoccupations take up much of the vmPFC’s resources in OCD and other mental health disorders with strong preoccupying thoughts (Etkin et al., 2010).

The aim of the proposed project is to further our understanding of how preoccupation affects valuation in different anxiety-related patient groups. We will use a set of tasks investigating safety signals (CS-) – asking how much these patients can learn about stimuli that are safe. In addition, we believe that preoccupation interferes with everyday information processing and decision making - which we will test using a modified attentional task.

This project is aimed to tackle the dimension of preoccupation in anxiety related disorders that we believe burdens the vmPFC and interferes with everyday activities. We are looking for an enthusiastic PhD student who is invested in mental health research and is keen to be involved in paradigm design and computational modeling of data.

**References:**


Funding details:

This project is in competition for a College of Life Sciences (CLS) PhD Studentship. The Studentship is for three years, starting September 2019, and offers tuition fees at UK/EU rates and a Stipend at UK Research Council rates.

Entry requirements:

Applicants are required to hold/or expect to obtain a UK Bachelor Degree 2:1 or better in a relevant subject. The University of Leicester English language requirements apply where applicable.

How to apply:

You should submit your application using our online application system. We are unable to consider applications submitted by email.

Guidance for completing the online application form: Under ‘Select your area of study,’ choose ‘Neuroscience Psychology and Behaviour Research’; under ‘Select your intake date,’ choose ‘September 2019’.

In the Funding section of the application, select please state you wish to be considered for a NPB College of Life Sciences Funded Studentship.

In the Research Proposal section of the application, please provide the name of the supervisor and project you want to be considered for. You do not need a research proposal but you should submit a personal statement explaining why you are interested in this project.

Project / Funding Enquiries: Applicants are encouraged to contact prospective supervisors by email or phone to discuss the project and their interests prior to submitting a formal application.

Application enquiries to pgradmissions@le.ac.uk

Closing date for applications: Monday 21 January 2019