

EECS (research group)

The research group Exceptional Experience and Consciousness Studies (EECS), based at the University of Northampton, is the largest centre for parapsychological research in the world. Its members adopt a critical but sympathetic stance to claims of psychic (psi) experiences, studying their impact on health and wellbeing, and investigating psi ability in laboratory testing.

History

EECS was originally the Centre for the Study of Anomalous Psychological Processes (CSAPP), founded in 2000 and consisting of psychologists with interests in cognitive psychology, neuropsychology, parapsychology, transpersonal psychology and consciousness research. As part of a faculty-wide restructure, in 2017 CSAPP was renamed EECS as a recognized Special Interest Group within the Centre for Psychological and Sociological Sciences.

Academic interest in parapsychology at the University of Northampton (at that time known as Nene College) started in 1995 with the appointment of [Chris Roe](#), who completed his PhD at the [Koestler Parapsychology Unit](#) under the supervision of Professor [Robert Morris](#). In 1996 Roe established an undergraduate module on parapsychology (PSY3007) which has been part of the psychology programme ever since. In 1997 he won internal funding to finance a doctoral scholarship in parapsychology, which was awarded to [Christine Simmonds-Moore](#). This began a tradition of using funding opportunities to support the development of new researchers, drawing on sources such as the [Bial Foundation](#) and the [Society for Psychical Research](#).

Roe was joined by another KPU PhD laureate, [Simon Sherwood](#), from 1998 to 2012. In 1999, the College was given degree awarding powers (previously they were validated by Leicester University) and changed its name to University College Northampton. [Deborah Delaney](#), also from the KPU, was appointed as a professor of psychology, with responsibility for research leadership. In collaboration with Roe and Sherwood, Delaney was instrumental in establishing CSAPP as a recognised centre of research excellence within the University of Northampton, and became its first director in 2000. CSAPP's mission statement was as follows:

Despite over a century of investigation, parapsychological and transpersonal phenomena (such as ESP, PK, and other exceptional capacities) remain a challenge to our understanding of the human psyche. CSAPP's mission is to seek a scientific understanding of these phenomena and to gauge the impact of such beliefs and experiences on personal wellbeing. Education and training is an important part of our mission and CSAPP provides a supportive yet academically rigorous environment for undergraduate and postgraduate students, and is committed to providing balanced information for the general public.

Delanoy was promoted to associate dean for the School of Social Sciences at Northampton until her retirement in 2010. Sherwood became CSAPP lead on Delanoy's promotion, and remained so until he left the university in 2012. Roe served as CSAPP director from 2012 to 2017, at which point he became Research Lead for the Centre for Psychological and Sociological Sciences

The group was later joined by [Richard Broughton](#), former director of the Rhine Research Center (2004-2012). In 2005 University College Northampton was awarded research degree awarding powers and was renamed the University of Northampton. (This required the UK government to repeal a Royal Decree from Henry III in 1265 that dissolved the existing university at Northampton and banned the establishment of another university in the town.)

For 2005 to 2009, the group welcomed German researcher [Harald Walach](#) and colleagues Thilo Hinterberger, Niko Kohls, Majella Horan, Marie-Louise Gander-Ferrari, Ursula Mochty, Daniela Hahn, and Andreas Sommer. In 2007 Walach developed an MSc programme in Transpersonal Psychology and Consciousness Studies. Alasdair Gordon-Finlayson was appointed to support this programme. Subsequently, a number of research students have remained on the faculty as active members of EECS following the award of their PhD, including Elizabeth Roxburgh, [Glenn Hitchman](#), Charmaine Sonnex, [Callum Cooper](#), [David Saunders](#), and Louise Spiers.

Current Activities

Located within the psychology division, EECS is now one of the largest centres for parapsychological research in the world. Following the example of the Koestler Unit, EECS seeks a better understanding of exceptional human experiences by adopting a sympathetic stance to claims of psi, scrutinizing the claims, studying the impact of the experiences on health and wellbeing, and investigating psi ability through laboratory testing.

The centre has been led by Glenn Hitchman, Liz Gulliford, and currently has joint leads Callum Cooper and Lou Spiers. A core group comprises academic staff, PhD students, and research assistants. An extended group also includes academics and students at other institutions so as to encourage networking and support.

EECS research projects typically focus on a single type of exceptional experience using a mixed methods approach, including a range of methods from experimental, quantitative survey, qualitative analysis of interviews, and (Auto)ethnography with a focus on the circumstances, phenomenology and impacts of such experiences.

Topics under investigation (excluding PhD projects) include:

- phenomenology of after-death communications and the [Ganzfeld ESP](#) impact on those who report them (Roe, Cooper, Morrison)
- ecological approaches to [scopaesthesia](#) (Cooper)
- analysis of NDE case collection (Roe, Lewis-Earl)
- testing the theory of 'First Sight' using the [Bem 'feeling the future' paradigm](#) (Roe, Patton, Hopkins)

- survey of exceptional experiences among people with epilepsy (Spiers, Roe, Hopkins)
- using random number generators (RNG) to test for consciousness effects at football matches (Roe, Hitchman)
- does Ganzfeld stimulation elicit a shift away from normal waking consciousness, and is this associated with ESP task success? (Roe, Saunders, Maclean, Hopkins)
- trait x State Predictors of Performance in Ganzfeld: An International Multisite Study (Roe, Maclean)
- [lucid dreams](#) and [precognition](#) (Saunders)
- Prevalence and phenomenology of paradoxical lucidity (Roe)
- noncontact healing (Roe, Spiers, Morrison)

Mediums and Mediumship in UK

An on-going collaboration with individuals and groups such as the Arthur Findlay College enables the exploration of aspects of mediumship, both mental and physical, from the perspective of clients, mediums and scientists. Mediumship experiences are accepted in other cultures, but in ours are disavowed; however, some people are able to interpret and manage their experiences while continuing to function normally. This is being studied within the EECS, to generate an understanding that may help others deal with anomalous experiences.

Dream Research

Dream research has found a fresh impetus at EECS. A meta-analysis by Chris Roe of dream [ESP experiments since the late 1960s at Maimonides](#) and elsewhere confirmed highly significant effects: Maimonides effect size = 0.33, $p = 10 \times 10^{-9}$, post-Maimonides effect size = 0.14, $p = 0.0001$.^[1] A 2017 update again found the results to be extremely significant (effect size = 0.20, $p = 5,19 \times 10^{-8}$). Dream research at EECS has been similarly successful, with a 31% hit rate over 6 experiments and 183 trials where 25% is expected by chance ($p = 0.03$).^[2]

In 2019 Saunders received a Perrott-Warrick grant for a dream ESP study exploring lucid dreams and their potential for precognitive content.

Clinical Parapsychology

Despite being relatively common, paranormal experiences are poorly understood and can be a source of distress for the experiencer. People are generally reticent to disclose their experiences, fearing that they will be labelled credulous or even pathological. Limited access to balanced, evidence-based information about the circumstances, causes and consequences of paranormal experiences can exacerbate difficulties experiencers face when trying to make sense of what has happened to them. A significant research focus for EECS has been to map such spontaneous real-world experiences and, where appropriate, normalise them by showing that they occur as part of the normal range of healthy human experience. By documenting experiences and the meaning-making that occurs in response to them, we aim to educate mental health professionals with respect to the best way

to understand such phenomena and to support those who disclose them. ^[3] (See also [Clinical Parapsychology](#))

Past Activities

Past research activities include:

- role of the emotional systems in mediating intuition and anomalous experiences (Broughton)
- comparing remote viewing and ganzfeld conditions in a precognition task (Roe, Cooper)
- mapping experiences of telephone telepathy (Roe, L-A Smith)
- prevalence and phenomenology of synchronicity experiences in the clinical setting (Roxburgh, Evenden)
- lability and PK performance: Identifying the optimal conditions for PK-RNG effects in laboratory using an I-Ching task (Drennan, Roe)
- testing the psi-mediated instrumental response theory using an implicit psi task (Luke, Hitchman, Roe)

Two of the main activities at Northampton, also being pursued extensively elsewhere, have been psi testing with random number generators and [remote viewing](#).

Random Number Generators

Random number generators (RNG) have been used principally to investigate psychokinesis (PK), the purported ability to affect matter through the action of mind, and precognition, the ability to predict outcomes. PK was first tested with RNGs in the early 1970s by [Helmut Schmidt](#), a German-born physicist and parapsychologist who reported highly significant effects.

Researchers have continued to use these electronic ‘coin-flippers’ in PK experiments ever since, and the accumulated effect size from over 500 experiments, although small in magnitude, is significant to the level of 16.1 sigma.^[4] Neither quality issues nor selective reporting can explain the results, and they appear broadly distributed.^[5] A recent, determinedly conservative meta-analysis found a significant effect size (0.500035) across 380 studies, although this finding remains ambiguous, as the outcome is reversed when three large experiments with negative effects sizes are included ($z -3.67, p < 0.001$).^[6]

Besides demonstrating the existence of psi, parapsychologists are also concerned with the processes involved, and this is a strong focus of activity at EECS. Since 2009, Chris Roe and colleagues have been trying to unravel the conditions most suitable to eliciting precognition. They use a method in which the task is implicit: subjects are not told they are being tested for precognition, and instead are asked to indicate a preference for a particular picture in a set of four, of which one is the precognitive ‘target’. This approach has been found to yield a greater effect size (0.03)^[7] than studies in the earlier precognition meta-analysis, in which subjects understood the true nature of the task (0.01). In some of these studies, personality

variables such as openness to experience were found to correlate with precognition performance. (See also this [self-study](#) by Herb Mertz)

Remote Viewing

Remote Viewing (RV) is a methodological procedure for ESP, where the percipient is required to view distant objects, geographical locations and events across a distant spacetime point. Chris Roe and Stuart Flint performed a remote viewing experiment using a ganzfeld induction procedure on 14 novice sender-receiver pairs, and obtained significant scoring on a weighted sum of ranks ($p = 0.008$).^[8] To discover the contribution of the ganzfeld procedure in this success, Cal Cooper, then a PhD student, devised a controlled experiment in which remote viewing was carried out with and without a ganzfeld induction and found a hit rate of 35% under the ganzfeld condition.^[9]

In June 2020, EECS published the results obtained in three ganzfeld-remote viewing comparison studies, in which 110 participants produced 43 hits in the ganzfeld stimulation condition (39%), giving a highly significant positive deviation from chance expectation (sum of ranks = 225, $p = 0.000012$). In the waking (non-ganzfeld) remote viewing condition they achieved 30 hits (27.5%), which is only marginally above chance expectation (sum of ranks = 253, $p = 0.034$).^[10]

PhD Students

Current

EECS students currently researching PhDs include:

Kirsty Allan: Psi experiences induced in floating tanks

Piero Cavi-Parisetti: Knowledge and critical examination of evidence suggesting survival as an aid to grief recovery

[Michael Daw](#): Differential effect of omnivorous, vegetarian, vegan, and fasting diets on psi

Rachel Evenden, now lecturer in psychology at the University of Northampton: clinical parapsychology

Corrine Gretton-West: contribution of place to exceptional human experiences through photographic art

Yuan Jin: Exploring the mindfulness score and meditation experience between: local group vs distant group vs solitary meditation with experienced meditators, plus placebo, with absorption trait as a predictor

Felicity Kinnersley: Spiritualist mental mediumship development

Natalia Lavin: Anomalous experiences in the funeral industry

Aaron Lomas: phenomenology of apparitional and anomalous experiences reported during the Covid-19 pandemic

Ewen Maclean: clients' participation with mediumship in contemporary Britain

Elaine Rycroft: Does personality survive bodily death? Identifying best practice in investigating claims of reincarnation

Past

[Christine Simmonds-Moore](#), now professor of psychology at the University of West Georgia: schizotypy as an anomaly-prone personality (2003)

[David Luke](#), now associate professor of psychology at the University of Greenwich: psychology and parapsychology of beliefs about luck and their relation to beliefs about psi and psi performance (2007)

[Nicola Holt](#), now associate professor of psychology, University of the West of England: Creativity, altered states of consciousness and anomalous cognition: The role of epistemological flexibility in the creative process (2007)

Elizabeth Roxburgh, now senior lecturer in psychology at Canterbury Christ Church University: psychology and phenomenology of spiritualist mental mediumship (2010)

Siobhan Lynch, now lecturer in the school of medicine, University of St Andrews: Coping with university life: Can mindfulness help? (2011)

[Glenn Hitchman](#), now professor and head of psychology, School of Social Sciences at Heriot-Watt University Malaysia: psi mediated instrumental response theory with an implicit psi task (2012)

Sophie Drennan, now senior lecturer in psychology, University of Sunderland: individual lability, perceived stress, participant/researcher interaction, goal-intention and PK-RNG effects (2015)

Charmaine Sonnex, now lecturer in psychology, University of Buckingham: distant mental interaction effects of pagan healing spells (2016)

[Callum Cooper](#), now senior lecturer in psychology at Northampton University: bereavement and recovery (2017)

[David Saunders](#), now head of psychology and sociology, University of Northampton: lucid dreaming as a tool for performance enhancing sleep (2017)

Kimberley Sheffield: loving kindness meditation and its relationship with wellbeing (2017)

Jacqueline Stone: mindfulness-based activities in UK education (2020)

Erika Pratte: wellbeing impacts and clinical implications of near-death experiences (2021)

Chetak Nangare: comparison of Buddhist and parapsychological descriptions of psychic experiences (2021)

Louise Spiers, now senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Northampton: spiritual experiences in individuals with epilepsy (2022)

Sofia Machado Ferriera: Induced near-death experiences in healthy volunteers: phenomenology and aftereffects (2023)

Alex Wilson, now lecturer in psychology University of West London: The transformative nature of altered states of consciousness in youth subculture (2024)

Michael Duggan and Renaud Evrard

Literature

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Bösch, H., Steinkamp, F., Boller, E. (2006). Examining psychokinesis: The interaction of human intention with random number generators—A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin* 132, 497-523.

Luke, D.P., Delanoy, D. & Sherwood, S.J. (2008). Psi may look like luck: Perceived luckiness and beliefs about luck in relation to precognition. *Journal of Society for Psychical Research* 72, 193-207.

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Roe, C.A., Hodrien, A. & Kirkwood, L. (2012). Comparing remote viewing and ganzfeld conditions in a precognition task. In: Abstracts of presented papers:

Roe, C.A., Martin, H., & Drennan, S. (2014). Effects of participant and target system lability upon PK performance using an I Ching task. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 78, 219-39.

Roe, C., Grierson, S. & Lomas, A. (2012). Feeling the future: two independent replication attempts. *Proceedings of the Parapsychological Association 55th Annual*

Convention, Durham, North Carolina, 09-12 August 2012. Durham, North Carolina, USA: Parapsychological Association.

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Endnotes

Footnotes

1. ^ Sherwood & Roe (2003).
2. ^ Roe et al (2018).
3. ^ Roe (2020); Roxburgh & Evenden (2016); Roxburgh & Roe (2013).
4. ^ Radin & Nelson (2003).
5. ^ Radin & Ferrari (1991).
6. ^ Bosch et al (2006).

7. ^ Roe et al (2012).
8. ^ Roe & Flint (2007).
9. ^ Roe et al (2010).
10. ^ Roe et al (2020).

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