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How to catalyse collaboration

Introduction to the BCN Annual Report 2020

Dear BCN afficionados. It has been a very interesting year in many ways, to put it mildly. But despite the fact that Covid measures had great impact on the way we live and work, 2020 has nevertheless been a very productive year. This Annual Report will show a number of these highlights.

The title of this introduction is copied from a paper in a 2015 Nature Special Issue on Interdisciplinarity (Brown et al 2015), that Jean-Christophe Billeter alerted me to. In this paper, Rebekah Brown, Ana Deletic and Tony Wong from Monash University in Melbourne describe how their ambition to set up meaningful interdisciplinary research, in their case focusing on engineering and governance aspects of urban water research, started as a challenge that only slowly by slowly became more rewarding and successful. First, researchers from different disciplines were confronted with the fact that scientific topics, methods and culture were very different between research domains, and it took time for people to refrain from asserting the importance of their own field compared to others. Not all researchers were willing and able to cross those bridges. But it was found that those who stayed became more appreciative of the different scientific perspectives, that also enriched their projects, their individual careers, and also the societal relevance and possibilities for implementation. Furthermore, participants were able to obtain larger and larger grants, specifically because they were able to cover different rather than singular perspectives of complex issues. Key to the success of such collaborations, according to the authors, is the creation of ‘T formed scientists‘; researchers who are highly specialised and knowledgeable in their own field (the leg of the T), and at the same time sufficiently
integrated in broader interdisciplinary collaborations to enable novel connections and ideas (the horizontal part). As neuroscientists, we can of course relate to the example of neuronal sprouting, with continuous formation of novel connections – as well as the necessary pruning from time to time…

For successful interdisciplinarity, five principles are important, according to the authors. Here they are: 1) forge a shared mission that ‘provides a compelling account of the overall goal of the collaboration, including impact as a necessary outcome, that is sufficiently broad to incorporate meaningful roles for all participating disciplines’, 2) develop T shaped researchers by training young researchers in an interdisciplinary environment, 3) nurture constructive dialogue along the way by having easy exchanges between more senior researchers from different fields around common topics, 4) give institutional support, e.g. by establishing scientific career opportunities in interdisciplinary domains and by providing competitive interdisciplinary seeding grants for new collaborative projects and 5) to bridge research, policy and practice, e.g. by involving industry and other societal partners in thinking about training and research programmes as well as career opportunities.

Having been part of BCN for a number of years, these principles sound familiar. Due to the hard work of many BCN members, it seems we have created an environment that has high potential on the ‘journey towards T’. We train our Master and PhD students in interdisciplinary thinking from the very start, and we are proud that the BCN Research Master again obtained the top score of the Netherlands Neuroscience Masters this April (Keuzegids Master 2021). Further, our interdisciplinary platform provides many opportunities, referenced in this annual report, that ensure frequent exchange and discussion on neuroscience topics from a wide array of different angles, nicely fitting the ‘constructive dialogue’ principle. Regarding the first principle, we should acknowledge that in the past years we tried to formulate a common BCN neuroscience research focus several times, but found it hard to find one that would really cover most of the different disciplines and interests. The first principle could perhaps help us to look a bit beyond, at common goals rather than specific study topics, and adding the societal impact we strive for. Looking at institutional support, there may also be room for growth. The University of Groningen has recently adopted interdisciplinarity as a central theme with four overarching topics, but establishing specific ‘bridge’ positions for PI’s and/or PhD students would be an interesting addition that could strengthen these endeavours. The other suggestion from the Nature paper is to provide interdisciplinary seeding grants. The one thing we have not been able to provide as a Research School, was funding to support promising interdisciplinary projects. We hope we will be able to make a modest start this year, by offering a novel competitive BCN starting grant. However, we would need help from all participating faculties as well as the University Board to really let this fly. To be continued...

For now, I want to thank you all for your inspiration, your hard work, and your willingness to cross borders, all of which have taken us where we are now. I hope you will enjoy this overview of the year 2020. And I also hope that we will be able to meet again, in person, in the coming year.

By Robert Schoevers

References
Keuzegids Masters 2021 (https://keuzegids.nl/product/keuzegids-masters-2021/)
BCN’s Participating Faculties

Who’s in BCN? There are five faculties from the University of Groningen and one faculty from the University of Twente that participate in the Research School of Behavioural and Cognitive Neuroscience (BCN). From these faculties a selection of researchers affiliated with the following research institutes are active within BCN.

1. The Research Institute Brain and Cognition from the Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMW) / University Medical Center Groningen (UMCG).

2. The Groningen Institute for Evolutionary Life Sciences (GELIFES): Neurobiology and Behavioural Biology and the Bernoulli Institute for Mathematics, Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence from the Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE).

3. The Heymans Institute (HI) from the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences (GMW).

4. The Groningen Research Institute of Philosophy (GRIPh) from the Faculty of Philosophy (FW).

5. The Center for Language and Cognition Groningen (CLCG) from the Faculty of Arts (LET).

6. The Technical Medical Centre (TechMed Centre) from the University of Twente.

> MORE INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND HERE
https://www.rug.nl/bcn

PHOTO BY SANDER MARTENS
BCN’s science & education

One of the core goals of BCN is to stimulate multidisciplinary research within the field of neuroscience. Within BCN we do everything we can to bring our researchers into contact with each other in order to foster creative collaborations across faculties and disciplines. The results are shown in the projects, papers, grants, and new studies that are produced each year and highlighted in this annual report.

As for our education, we are more than happy with the fact that BCN’s master programme is regarded as the very best neuroscience programme in the Netherlands. The BCN Research Master’s programme has been awarded with the ‘Top Degree Programme’ predicate several times already, and this was again the case in 2020.

We believe the ongoing success of BCN is dependent on three unique aspects of this programme. First, we try to bring small-scale education, by admitting a maximum number of 15 students in each of the three tracks (Human and Animal Behavioural Neurosciences (B-track), Cognitive Neurosciences (C-track) and Clinical and Molecular Neurosciences (N-track). A second important factor is the interdisciplinarity of the programme. Students come from a broad range of disciplines, not only Biology, Life Sciences, and Psychology but also Movement Sciences, Computer Science, and Artificial Intelligence. Their lecturers come from no less than five faculties (Science and Engineering, Medical Sciences, Behavioural and Social Sciences, Philosophy and Arts). We train students to think outside of ‘their’ field and come up with interdisciplinary research questions. Moreover, since 2019 we started giving an ‘interdisciplinarity prize’ to the student who has best shown to have stepped over the borders of disciplines. The third aspect is a focus on research. BCN students perform two large research projects during their master, and other courses in BCN are also strongly research-oriented. After graduation, around 75% of the students continue with a PhD project. This unique combination of features helps BCN lecturers to optimally prepare our students for their future (research) careers. Alumni mention that the small groups and the experience the students get during the two master projects really helped them get a head start with their PhD projects. Since recent years, we have been monitoring our alumni more closely, and have created a community of (former) BCN students, who can also later in their careers help each other by starting collaborations or sharing job opportunities. For this, we started a BCN LinkedIn Group, which already provides a nice impression of the current careers of our former students. In addition, the BCN Student Council will continue to organize the BCN Alumni Event every year.

We hope you, as a BCN Researcher will continue to supervise our students, thus maintaining the high quality of our programme.

On behalf of the BCN Staff,

■ JELMER PANDER
(JELMER.PANDER@RUG.NL)
PROGRAMME COORDINATOR BCN
In 2020, 22 students enrolled in the BCN Research Master’s degree programme, of which 20 (87%) were women. The proportion of students with a Dutch BSc (64%) was higher compared to the proportion of students with a non-Dutch BSc (36%). It is likely that the COVID pandemic has had an impact on the influx of non-Dutch students. Interestingly though, the proportion of students with a Dutch nationality (45%) is comparable with the proportion of students with a different nationality (55%). This suggests that once students are in the Netherlands they tend to stay; opting to do a Master here.
Influx of PhD students

In 2020, 44 PhD students enrolled in the BCN PhD training programme, of which 73% were women. This is a slight reduction from last year, which saw 50 new PhD students. Eleven percent of the PhD students are from the Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE), 59% from the Faculty of Medical Science/University Medical Center Groningen (FMW/UMCG), 18% from the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences (GMW) and 11% from the Faculty of Arts (LET).

The majority of PhD students come from the Netherlands (59%), followed by Southern Europe (11%), Latin America (9%), Western Europe (7%), China (7%), India (5%) and Eastern Europe (2%).
Theses defenses

In 2020, 49 PhD BCN students defended their dissertations. Sixteen percent of the PhD students were from the Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE), 65% from the Faculty of Medical Science/University Medical Center Groningen (FMW/UMCG), 8% from the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences (GMW), 8% from the Faculty of Arts (LET) and 2% from the Faculty of Philosophy.

A more detailed overview is available here: https://www.rug.nl/research/behavioural-cognitive-neurosciences/organisation/bcn-dissertations-2020

PHOTO BY SANDER MARTENS
Cheeky propositions

“Words reduce reality to something the human mind can grasp, which isn’t very much.” (Eckhart Tolle)
> Elise van der Stouwe, BCN Newsletter issue 117

“Life doesn’t get any easier, we just get better at it.” (Pieter de Jong)
> Tristan de Jong, BCN Newsletter issue 117

“Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.” (Albert Einstein)
> Angelica Sabogal Guáqueta, BCN Newsletter issue 118

“If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?” (Albert Einstein)
> Hanneke Geugies, BCN Newsletter issue 118

“What the world of tomorrow will be like is greatly dependent on the power of imagination in those who are learning to read today.” (Astrid Lindgren)
> Anne Richter, BCN Newsletter issue 119

Marie Curie’s statement about the fear of radioactivity also applies to the current COVID-19 pandemic “Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.”
> Anna Schildt, BCN Newsletter issue 119

“Wisdom is like a baobab tree, no one individual can embrace it.” (Ewe proverb)
> Nathaniel Larkey, BCN Newsletter issue 119

“Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance.” (Will Durant®)
> Nathaniel Larkey, BCN Newsletter issue 119

“Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.” (Zora Neale Hurston)
> Nathaniel Larkey, BCN Newsletter issue 119

“Adaptability is the most valuable human skill and the greatest challenge in understanding physiology from disease.”
> Joana Oliveira Carvalho, BCN Newsletter issue 119

“As a PhD student, you are the captain of your own ship. However, it is essential to have a good compass for guidance and a supportive crew on board.”
> Friederieke Reeβing, BCN Newsletter issue 119

“Creativity is intelligence having fun.” (Albert Einstein)
> Sara Kuik, BCN Newsletter issue 120

“The perfect blend for having no limits is having the curiosity of your inner child, the thrive of your puberty and the wisdom of your adulthood.”
> Kelly Anzola, BCN Newsletter issue 120

“Leven is makkelijker dan je denkt, maar moeilijker als je denkt.” [“Life is easier than you think, but harder when you think”] (Guido Weijers)
> Joost van den Dool, BCN Newsletter issue 120
Prize cabinet

BCN members were very successful in receiving many prizes and grants. An impression of a good year:

**Donders Brinkhorst Prize**

**Ronald Bierings** has been awarded with the Donders Brinkhorst prize for his dissertation "Insight into Light", judged to be the best PhD thesis in the field of ophthalmology.  
https://www.oogheelkunde.org/donders-binkhorst-stichting

**Spinoza Prize awarded to Pauline Kleingeld**

**Pauline Kleingeld** has won the Spinoza Prize 2020. The NWO Spinoza Prize is the highest distinction in Dutch academia.  

**Young Academy Groningen (YAG)**

**Hanna van Loo** is one of the new members that will be installed into the UG’s Young Academy Groningen.  
BCN Awards

The following prizes were awarded during the 2020 BCN Winter Meeting:

BCN dissertation award 2019/2020
Danique Vlaskamp
(Faculty of Medical Sciences)
**BCN PhD poster prizes**

**Justine Dickhoff**
(Faculty of Medical Sciences, Cognitive Neuroscience Center)

**Marjorie van Kooten**
(Faculty of Medical Sciences, Cognitive Neuroscience Center)

**Janne Rozemarijn (Romy) Smit**
(Faculty of Science and Engineering)

**BCN Master student poster prize**

**Lukas Breitzler**
Grants & funding (selection)

ERC Consolidator Grant

UT/UMCG Scientist Sarthak Misra has been awarded a European Research Council (ERC) Consolidator Grant. Sarthak Misra is a full professor in the Department of Biomechanical Engineering (UT) and Department of Biomedical Engineering (UMCG). He will be awarded € 2.35 million to further expand on his research on developing novel steerable instruments for minimally invasive surgery.

Two Vici grants of 1.5 million euro for Judith Rosmalen and Liesbeth Veenhoff

UMCG-researchers Judith Rosmalen and Liesbeth Veenhoff both received a Vici-grant of 1.5 million euros. This grant of the Dutch Research Council (NWO) can be used by both researchers to develop an innovative line of research for the coming five years.

Judith Rosmalen has been researching psychosomatic illness for many years. She will use the Vici grant to study how experiences from a person’s youth can affect the degree to which they suffer from physical symptoms.

Liesbeth Veenhoff wants to know how and why cells change as they age. Her research focuses on changes in the nuclear pore complexes; the ‘gatekeepers’ to the nucleus.


PHOTOS FROM RUG WEBSITE

PHOTO BY GIJS VAN OUWERKERK

PHOTOS FROM RUG WEBSITE
Over 3 million euros for research in esketamine as a patient-friendly alternative to electroshocks

The UMCG, together with several hospitals and mental healthcare institutions, will start a study that may offer an alternative to electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) as a last resort in the treatment of major depression. In the coming years it will be investigated whether oral intake of the anaesthetic esketamine is equally effective or even more effective. The study could lead to an enormous improvement in the care of individuals with very severe depression for whom ECT is the only remaining treatment option because they do not or insufficiently respond to psychotherapy and antidepressants. This research is made possible with a subsidy of €3.2 million from Zorginstituut Nederland and ZonMw, through the subsidy scheme Veelbelovende Zorg (Promising Care).

Peter Meerlo (Groningen Institute for Evolutionary Life Sciences - GELIFES) was awarded an ENW-KLEIN grant by the NWO

The grant, worth €350,000, is for his research project ‘Sleep research goes wild – new insights into sleep homeostasis from studies in geese’. 

Prof. Marrink and Dr. Jansen partners in ENW-GROOT project of 2.7 million euro

Siewert-Jan Marrink of the Groningen Biomolecular Sciences and Biotechnology Institute (GBB) and Thomas la Cour Jansen from the Zernike Institute for Advanced Materials (ZIAM) are two of six partners in an ENW-GROOT project by the NWO. The project received €2.7 million in total, for research on how the PsbS protein in plants can recognize danger. 

BCN Research Master PhD research proposals

Each year, the UMCG Research Institute Brain and Cognition (B&C) / Graduate School of Medical Sciences (GSMS) offers 3-year PhD positions to recent graduates from the BCN Research Master Behavioural and Cognitive Neurosciences (N-track). Students can write and submit their own original PhD research proposal under the supervision of a B&C researcher. The PhD students will be employed by the UMCG and will have a regular 3-year PhD employee contract.

In 2020, seven students applied for a 3-year PhD positions and two PhD positions were granted. Nada Majerniková was granted a project in collaboration with prof. Wilfred den Dunnen and prof. Amalia Dolga, titled ‘Ferroptosis in Alzheimer’s disease: modeling the pathology using brain-on-a-chip platform’. Cyprien Guerrin was granted the second position with a project titled ‘The implication of prenatal inflammatory priming in the pathophysiology of schizophrenia’ under supervision of Janine Doorduin and prof. Erik de Vries.
One million euro for ‘No guts, no glory’

The Brain Foundation (de Hersenstichting) granted one million euro to the UMCG, Wageningen University, and Wincloev Probiotics for research on how the gut can be manipulated to fight brain diseases. Led by Iris Sommer (Psychiatrist, Cognitive Neuroscience Center/BSCS/UMCG), Sven van Ijzendoorn (Cell biologist, BSCS/UMCG), and Gerard Dijkstra (gastro-enterologist UMCG), the gut of people with Parkinson’s Disease, Alzheimer’s Disease, Schizophrenia and bipolar disorders will be manipulated via a natural way in this interdisciplinary research project. The aim is to lower the disease related symptoms and improve the mental health. If the project is successful, almost half a million Dutch people with a brain disease will directly benefit from it. One million euro is the highest amount the foundation ever granted to a research project.

For more info (in Dutch), see: https://www.hersenstichting.nl/nieuws/1-miljoen-voor-onderzoek-naar-relatie-tussen-darmen-en-hersen/
Catheleine van Driel and Wim Veling (psychiatry, UMCG) have received a ZonMW grant of half a million euros to conduct research into reducing stress with VRelax, a virtual reality relaxation app.

The research focuses on individuals with depression, psychosis, bipolar or anxiety disorder. Veling and Van Driel will investigate whether the app’s interactive VR nature environments help to relax, reduce stress and improve sleep. It is expected that improvement of these lifestyle factors will lead to a more favourable course of psychiatric illnesses.
Iris Sommer—unravelling biological mechanisms of psychiatric disorders

When Iris Sommer retires, she wants to leave behind a new treatment for psychiatric illness that really makes a difference. “I realise this is easier said than done,” she tells The Lancet Psychiatry. “In neurology, we understand the underlying mechanisms so much better than before. But in psychiatry, we are still trying to understand even the basic mechanisms behind many conditions.”

Now director of the Research Institute of Brain and Cognition at University Medical Center Groningen, Groningen, Netherlands, Sommer’s career has always crossed the boundaries between neurology and psychiatry. “I began doing research in the first year of medical school,” she says. At medical school in Amsterdam she worked on research projects on depression in twins with Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s disease.

Her first clinical work was with patients with Parkinson’s disease, but her fascination with psychosis made her choose to become a psychiatrist, and she trained with Rene Kahn (now chair of psychiatry at Mount Sinai, New York, NY, USA). Her PhD and much of her clinical work since has been on understanding schizophrenia.

Her first publication as a PhD student was in reporting on the phenomenon of cerebral mirror-imaging, a consequence of monozygotic twinning. During her PhD was also when she and her husband (Robert Schoevers) had their two children. “I found that research was much more flexible than clinic work with a young family,” she says.

For much of the last two decades she studied auditory hallucinations and established a “Voices Clinic” at the University of Utrecht, Utrecht, Netherlands to help these voices, there is language activity mainly in the right hemisphere, in contrast to normal language, which involves mainly the left. More recently, in collaboration with Kenneth Hugdahl at the University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway (where she was a visiting professor), they discovered that a specific area of the brain activates just before a voice is heard, and then deactivates again shortly before the voice stops. “It’s almost like a switch,” Sommer explains. “We are currently writing up the results and looking at ways to target that switch to turn the voices off.”

Simultaneously, she performed clinical trials to optimise treatment for people with schizophrenia, with one recently published in this journal.

In 2016, Sommer’s career changed direction when she took up a post at the Department of Biomedical Sciences at the University Medical Center Groningen. The facilities in this new location allow her to study cellular and molecular brain mechanisms that might underpin psychiatric disorders. “Many mechanisms could play a role in multiple psychiatric symptoms across different diagnoses,” she says. “I began doing research in the first year of medical school. I always like to ask why, rather than just learn the facts”

“Iris is one of the most creative and knowledgable enthusiastic persons I have ever met. She is the queen of research on hallucinations,” says Hugdahl. “Her enthusiasm but perhaps equally much the way she cares for people.”

When my wife passed away three years ago, Iris invited me to spend time with her research group because ‘we need to cheer you up’, which she did by inviting me to her home and discussing science while walking her dog in the evenings.”

Tony Kirby

www.thelancet.com/psychiatry 18 July 2020

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When investigating cellular and molecular mechanisms, it makes sense to broaden the scope to also include bipolar disorder, unipolar depression and even neurological diseases like Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s disease.”

Her team is now studying how the microbiome might influence cognition, which could be relevant for various psychiatric and neurological disorders. An ongoing study is analysing the effects of providing nine bacterial strains that impair gut barrier function for patients with bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. “The microbiome is something we can manipulate easily,” she explains.

Sommer’s team, including PhD student Janna de Boer, is developing a biomarker based on the quantitative analysis of spontaneous speech. Such a biomarker could facilitate diagnosis of psychiatric disorders and alert patients to relapses. “The acoustics, linguistic, grammar and prosody all change when people develop a psychiatric disorder. Specific speech characteristics provide information about the type and severity of that disorder,” explains Sommer.

She also initiated and leads the nationwide HAMLET (short for Psychosis and Brain) consortium, a large treatment study for people with a first episode of psychosis, who are followed up for 10 years. This consortium not only yields information on the clinical course of psychosis and the influence of antipsychotic medication, but it also unites most psychosis centres in the Netherlands, providing a 360° circle for implementation of new findings.

Outside her lab she is a bestselling scientific writer, now finishing her fourth book on different aspects of the brain and brain disorders. A book reviewer called her the Dutch Oliver Sacks, an author that she admires and with whom she wrote a case report for The Lancet. “She is one of the most creative and knowledgable enthusiastic persons I have ever met. She is the queen of research on hallucinations,” said Hugdahl. “Her enthusiasm but perhaps equally much the way she cares for people.”

When my wife passed away three years ago, Iris invited me to spend time with her research group because ‘we need to cheer you up’, which she did by inviting me to her home and discussing science while walking her dog in the evenings.”

Tony Kirby
Good intentions, change, and the senior brain
André Aleman (UMCG) was frequently interviewed in the national press about good intentions, changing habits, and whether a senior brain is fit enough to be the president.

Organ-on-a-chip
Amalia Dolga (Faculty of Science and Engineering) was interviewed by Medicines magazine for her research on Regenerative pharmacology, which was featured on its cover.

Tinnitus
Pim van Dijk (UMCG) was interviewed about tinnitus in a number of national newspapers, including NRC and Algemeen Dagblad.

Virtual office
Martijn Wieling (Faculty of Arts) was interviewed by the NewScientist, NRC, Mr. Online, RTV Noord, Scienceguide. In Dagblad van het Noorden, he talks about how he missed social interaction at work, and ended up creating his own virtual office to get in touch again with his colleagues.

Virtual treatment
Wim Veling (UMCG) has been using virtual reality for treating psychosis for a number of years, but it has also proven useful in reducing stress in nurses during the corona crisis, featured in two TV items (Nieuwsuur & Eenvandaag).

Why we should go outside, even in winter
Roelof Hut (Faculty of Science and Engineering) was interviewed by the national news website nu.nl, explaining why it’s important to go outside, even in winter. Also, for the UKrant, he gave tips to focus at home, and explained in the television show ‘Radar’ why Olympic swimmers peak at 5.12 P.M.

‘Cleaners of the brain’ in Science
Microglia, cells in the brain that clean up damage and clutter, develop in the brain much earlier than previously thought. Molecular neurobiologists Bart Eggen and his colleagues (UMCG) discovered that already early in the development of a fetus, these cells resemble the microglia as we know them in adults. With this knowledge, they hope to develop more effective treatments to reduce brain damage caused by pregnancy infections. Their results appeared in Science.
New book on ADHD
Psychologist Laura Batstra (UMCG) has written a book, Hoe voorkom je ADHD? Door de diagnose niet te stellen (How can ADHD be prevented? By not diagnosing it). She organized Festival Apaart, for more tolerance for people who are ‘different’ and also developed a plan for children's birthday parties for the whole class. [https://www.rug.nl/news/2020/02/we-zitten-vast-in-het-stoornisdenken](https://www.rug.nl/news/2020/02/we-zitten-vast-in-het-stoornisdenken)

New book on the female brain
Following Iris Sommer’s (UMCG) popular science book “The seven senses” that came out two years ago, a new book on how the female brain differs from that of males was published this autumn.

New book on conscious awareness
Jacob Jolij (Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences) published a book in which he wonders whether conscious awareness is more than just a neurobiological function of the brain.

BCN on YouTube
Check out these BCN Researchers on YouTube: [https://www.rug.nl/research/behavioural-cognitive-neurosciences/organisation/bcn-researchers-on-youtube](https://www.rug.nl/research/behavioural-cognitive-neurosciences/organisation/bcn-researchers-on-youtube)
Marvelous Mind
Marvelous Mind officially started in 2019 and is a neuroscience outreach programme on the initiative of the research institute Brain and Cognition, from the UMCG. We modelled the concept in analogy to the initiative Brein in Beeld from Amsterdam (www.breininbeeld.nl), and we aimed to establish coverage of this concept in Groningen.

Our goal is to share knowledge, start conversations and spark interest concerning the brain, brain disorders, mental health issues, and ongoing research projects within the Brain and Cognition area at the UMCG. We address questions about brain function; in isolation, in relation to our bodies, to society and the rest of the world. Considering mental health issues, we focus on understanding, accepting, and informing about the treatment approaches; now and in the future.

We organize “Mind Movies”, a thematic concept where a movie is introduced in +/- 15 minutes by an expert in the field, followed up by a short discussion. Furthermore, we work together with other parties of the University Hospital to organize other thematic gatherings. The themes that have been addressed so far are; suicide, forgetting, depression, epilepsy, dementia, learning a second language, deep brain stimulation, artificial intelligence, apathy and hallucinogens for depression.

Our target audience is the general public, patients and their family and students of all faculties. We try to provide an accessible experience for all interested parties, especially people who would not normally
attend a scientific seminar and try to think of new ways to make our events more inclusive. Marvelous Mind is organized by both professionals and students from Research Institute Brain and Cognition of the UMCG.

At this point, we have hosted multiple successful events at the theatre of the Groninger Forum. We have relocated with them to the new Forum Groningen building and usually, all seats are filled. Currently, we host our Mind Movies on a bimonthly basis on Monday evenings. In addition to the Mind Movies, we contribute to other events, for example, Zpannend Zernike, Noorderzon and the Brain Olympiade and have worked together with other outreach parties, such as Science Linx. In 2020, together with Jelte Posthumus we created podcast series, called ‘de Bovenverdieping’, which consist of six episodes, featuring Janniko Georgiadis, Teus van Laar, Marie-José van Tol, André Aleman, Alain Dekker, and Joukje van der Naalt. You can find them at our website https://www.rug.nl/research/bcn-brain/marvelousmind/podcasts and on Spotify.

In the future, we plan on growing and integrating other regular outreach activities to have a bigger impact in Groningen and possibly in the Northern Provinces. We are always open into new ideas and collaborations, you can reach out to us via email; marvelousmind@rug.nl. Especially students (bachelor and master level) are most welcome to strengthen us with new outreach ideas and initiatives.

**BY IRIS SOMMER**

**EVENT PHOTOS BY MICHEL HOOIVELD**
Other activities & events

BCN 2020 Winter meeting

Little did we know how much we were going to miss these crowds of BCN members…! Although we recently had a very successful Winter meeting in Gather Town, most of us will probably experience nostalgic feelings when seeing these pictures of BCN’s 2020 Winter meeting. Let’s hope things will return back to normal soon!

PHOTOS BY SANDER MARTENS
BCN Brain and Cognition visited by funding agency

On March 3rd 2020, Research Institute Brain and Cognition was visited by the Hersenstichting, a national funding agency funding much brain research. Various lectures and demos were given, including those given by Alain Dekker, Joukje van der Naalt, Robert Schoevers, Barbara van Munster, Erik de Vries, Marc van Dijk, Teus van Laar, Emma Gerrits, Marina de Koning-Tijssen, Wim Veling and Bart Lestestuiver, and Branislava Ćurčić-Blake.

BCN Retreat

Because of the Corona pandemic, BCN organized together with the BCN PhD council three one-day online editions of the BCN retreat. These retreats allowed PhD students to partake in disseminating their research to peers, as well as to those who are not in their field.

The social part of the retreat is also an important aspect. After trying-out a few activities, the Elevator Pitch seemed to be the best online option. The PhD students were asked to prepare a pitch of two minutes to explain their research in a small, changing, group. This was a nice training opportunity for developing communication skills, as well as an opportunity to quickly get to know a lot of other PhD students and their research topics.

An online world

BCN managed to change all courses to online versions. Some of them hybrid, like the Orientation and Human Neuroanatomy courses, and some in a classroom when allowed by the Corona rules, like the Competence Management courses. Many thanks to the instructors of the courses. Because of the online format, we were even able to allow more participants to follow the Basics Statistics course, as well as the Advanced Statistics course.

BCN Lunch Lectures

In November the first series of the Lunch Lectures started. The idea is to have lunch together with PhD students, research master students and staff, every Thursday from 12:00-13:00hr.

The first Thursday of the month is reserved for BCN lectures. Deniz Baskent gave the first BCN lecture: “Hearing with your ears, hearing with your brain, hearing with a robot” Samvel Mkhitaryan from Maastricht University presented during the second meeting:
Dealing with complexity: How to use a hybrid approach to incorporate complexity in health behavior interventions.

The second Thursday of the month is for BCN Alumni. Emi Saliasi gave the first Alumnus lecture: – Life after the PhD – perspectives from a talent acquisition consultant. Jelmer Borst presented during the second meeting: How not to get a PostDoc after your PhD.

The third Thursday of the month is reserved for Dissertation Lectures and the forth for networking.

**BCN webinar**

The BCN conference Nothing but the Truth, originally planned to take place on October 19-20 last year, has been postponed due to the corona virus. The planning now is to organize a 1-day symposium on November 1, 2021 and hopefully a 2-day conference can be planned in 2022.

Meanwhile, on October 20th 2020, our first Nothing but the Truth online event was launched in collaboration with DASH. Casper Albers, professor in applied statistics and data visualization at the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences, gave a webinar titled ‘Looking at data: What the data can tell us’, which was well visited. During this webinar he shared his expertise on data visualization and misleading graphs.

More information will follow soon on our website [www.nothingbutthetruth.nl](http://www.nothingbutthetruth.nl)!
In many ways, 2020 has been a year like no other. The BCN PhD council tried to help and assist the BCN PhD community as much as possible through these difficult times.

Right from the beginning of the pandemic, we have been collecting stories about the struggles experienced by the PhD researchers of the programme. This resulted in a letter that was presented to the BCN Board to convey our concerns. The most commonly mentioned worry was the delay in research inclusion, and the uncertainty of when measurements could restart again. Unfortunately, many PhD researchers are still struggling with these issues.

On a more positive note, the council also tried to stay socially active. For example, we hosted virtual drinks and online gaming for the BCN PhD community. First on Zoom and then later in Gather Town. One event, which was the virtual BCN Pubquiz, was organized in the Borrel app (now called Mibo), which came as close to a real-life ‘borrel’ as we could get.

Mental health is of course one of the main priorities during this lockdown. Together with GOPHER, we organized a webinar on how to stay motivated and sane during the pandemic, led by Karen Huizing. Moreover, we managed to organize two yoga events, which at the time could be done in real-life with a small group of people.

Finally, the BCN PhD council helped organize and host online BCN events, such as the BCN retreat. This eventually also led to the weekly BCN lunch lectures, hosted on Zoom or in Gather Town every Thursday during lunch time. The lunch lectures have a large variety of different speakers and network opportunities, and are a great moment to take a break from work and meet and greet some colleagues.

In 2020, the BCN PhD council had to say goodbye to two of its beloved members; Sebastián Balart Sánchez and Rodrigo Moraga Amaro. The enormous amount of effort and positive energy they had put into the council will be missed. Fortunately, we were able to welcome four new members in their place. Nad’ka Majernikova, Lenny Marapin, Theresa Marschall and Sterre van der Veen, you are all very welcome! Let’s carry our inspired efforts into 2021!
And last but not least we had four beautiful newsletters!