**2022/2023 Summer Research Project Description**

Please use this template to create a description of each research project, eligibility requirements and expected deliverables. Project details can then be uploaded to each faculty, school, institute, and centre webpage prior to the launch of the program.

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| **Project title:** | **Are autistic traits neuroprotective in older age?** |
| **Project duration, hours of engagement & delivery mode** | 10 weeks during Summer Vacation.~ 30 hours per week. The project will be completed on-site at the School of Psychology at the University of Queensland, St Lucia.  |
| **Description:** | Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a lifelong neurological developmental disorder characterised by a range of impairments in core social cognitive capacities. Although much is now known about social cognitive function and how it relates to ASD during childhood and adolescence, far less is understood about ASD-related social cognitive impairments in later life. Interestingly, emerging evidence suggests that for people with ASD, the capacity to infer others’ mental states or theory of mind remains stable across the lifespan, which contrasts with the robust age-related declines in theory of mind that characterises normal adult ageing. This relative lack of decline seen in ASD aligns with the ‘Safeguard Hypothesis’, whereby the presence of ASD across the lifespan is characterised as protective against social-cognitive age-related decline. This is because the presence of ASD should theoretically be associated with the need to acquire adaptive strategies to mitigate cognitive challenges which are not present in typically developing persons. The present study provides a direct test of the Safeguard Hypothesis, by examining how age interacts with autistic traits on a range of different social cognitive tasks.  |
| **Expected outcomes and deliverables:** | The study provides an excellent opportunity to work as part of a large team over the summer period: to gain experience in experimental design, administration of standardized assessments, recruitment, and testing. They will also be invited to act as a confederate for a separate PhD study, to attend lab meetings with the larger group and in doing so learn about conducting research more generally.  |
| **Suitable for:** | This project will be best suited to a third- or fourth-year psychology student with an interest in continuing with research (e.g., honours or PhD).  |
| **Primary Supervisor:** | Professor Julie Henry. |
| **Further info:** | If you would like to chat further about the project, please don’t hesitate to get in touch with Julie via email: julie.henry@uq.edu.au |