

## Next generation of dementia scientists to explore genetic risk of Alzheimer's

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Biochemist Louise Serpell at work in her lab at University of Sussex

A gene that increases the risk of Alzheimer's disease by up to 10 times will be the focus of a new research centre at the University of Sussex launched today (Thursday 5 February).

Funded by Alzheimer's Society and matched funding, the new Doctoral Training Centre will support eight PhD students over five years to research the effects of the APOE4 gene.

Carriers of this gene have increased risk of developing Alzheimer's disease, although not all people with the gene develop the condition, and

not all people with Alzheimer's have the gene.

The students funded through the centre will explore how this gene affects the brain at all ages, in particular how it affects key parts of the brain associated with memory and learning, why the proteins made by this gene are different and how they potentially can be altered.

The centre is being led by biochemist Professor Louise Serpell, who is investigating toxic particles that cause degeneration in brain cells, and psychologist Professor Jennifer Rusted, whose research looks at the gene-environment interplay in cognitive ageing.

Professor Rusted said: "The Alzheimer's Society Doctoral Training Centre at the University of Sussex will provide a great opportunity to enhance the research into the causes of and treatments for this devastating disease that is already being carried out in the Schools of Psychology and Life Sciences."

Professor Serpell said: "We are honoured to accept this award from Alzheimer's Society and to be able to play a major part in the international focus to understand and tackle the challenges of this disease."

The Doctoral Training Centre is funded by a £350,000 grant from Alzheimer's Society and matched funding leveraged as a result of the Society's investment, from the Sussex Doctoral School and the Schools of Life Sciences and Psychology at the University.

Sussex philanthropist and businessman Michael Chowen CBE, who has made a substantial gift to the centre, said: "Having supported both Professor Serpell's and Professor Rusted's pioneering research on Alzheimer's disease for some time, I am delighted that I have been able to contribute towards the new Doctoral Training Centre.

"I wish them, and the colleagues and students who will be engaged in this Doctoral Centre with them, every success in their efforts to combat this cruel disease."

Professor Michael Davies, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), said: "We are delighted to be working with Alzheimer's Society on dementia research and for the Society's recognition of the quality of our doctoral provision in the Schools of Life Sciences and Psychology."

The Sussex centre is one of eight new specialist centres around the country that are being co-ordinated and funded by Alzheimer's Society. With additional funding from institutions, this represents nearly £5 million in new investment to support 55 PhDs and clinical fellows – the single biggest funding commitment to support early-career dementia researchers in the UK.

Dr Doug Brown, Director of Research at Alzheimer's Society, said: "There's a huge amount of progress being made by the dementia research community but unless we attract and train the best young talent we will limit how quickly we can make ground-breaking discoveries. For too long dementia research has been underfunded and as a result we have significantly fewer scientists than other conditions."

Provided by University of Sussex

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