

Evolutionary Psychiatry Special Interest Group (EPSIG)

Executive Committee Meeting – Minutes

Monday 24 March 2026 | 19:13 – 20:35 (approx.) | Via Zoom

Attendees

Present: Riadh Abed (Chair), Annie Swanepoel (Finance Officer), Tom Carpenter, Paul St John-Smith (Newsletter Editor), Paul Keedwell, Adam Hunt, Lenny Cornwall, David Geaney, Arif Khan, Henry O'Brien, Gurjot Brar

Apologies: Agnes Ayton, Elena Titova-Chaudhary, Muzaffer Kaser, Reem Abed

New Member: Gurjot Brar welcomed as the new Chair of the Irish Evolutionary Psychiatry SIG.

Item 2 – Chair's Report

Riadh noted that all matters from his report were already included as agenda items. No separate chair's report was given.

Item 3 – Financial Report

Annie reported that the November 2025 online symposium generated a surplus of almost £2,000. After subtracting prize money and other costs, the in-year surplus stands at £1,335.

Annie raised a concern that the previously accumulated balance of approximately £17,000–18,000 no longer appears in the latest accounts provided by the Royal College. She has queried this but has not yet received a response. Riadh noted the balance was largely theoretical, as the SIG has limited ability to access these funds directly.

Action: Annie to follow up with the College regarding the missing historical balance.

Item 4 – Shadow Trainee Committee & Resident Doctor Engagement Day

Shadow Trainee Executive Committee Report

Tom Carpenter reported that most of the shadow committee's recent work focused on organising the 4th Resident Doctor Engagement Event. Tom indicated he is exploring a transition of the committee chair role and is in early discussions with Ben Griffin as a potential successor. Tom will remain an active committee member.

4th Resident Doctor Engagement Event (13 March 2026)

Tom reported a successful event. Approximately 30 people attended in total (confirmed by Riadh from the event photograph, which showed 28 people with additional attendees not pictured). Over 20 were trainee participants. The event featured talks on psychosis and generated positive engagement, with 3–4 people requesting to join the trainee WhatsApp group and one person expressing interest in research activities.

The event had been at risk of cancellation due to a College minimum attendance requirement, but organizers held their nerve and the numbers came through.

Planning for Next Year's Event

The venue has been booked for 19 March 2027. Early-stage theme discussions include a translational focus (“How can evolutionary psychiatry help in practical ways?”). Paul suggested a morning of explanation and an afternoon exploring its impact on treatment. Riadh proposed Gurjot as a speaker, given his work on mismatch reduction. Annie suggested including neurodevelopmental disorders, referencing a recent paper by Ben and Riadh.

A poster session was proposed with a low threshold for entry, primarily to help trainees access study budgets for travel and attendance. An A3 format was agreed as sufficient; no lamination required. The prize for the winner of the poster competition will be non-monetary in the form of a certificate. It was suggested the College be asked to print posters on inexpensive paper.

PTC Representation

Arif Khan raised the importance of links with the Psychiatry Trainees' Committee (PTC). It was noted that the current PTC representative is Monica Francis. Tom agreed to reach out to Monica and explore expressions of interest from other PTC members.

Action: Tom to contact Monica Francis and the PTC to invite new expressions of interest for EP SIG representation.

Item 5 – Newsletter

Paul (SJS) reported that the next newsletter is being assembled. It will include three trainee essays (from the prize), Tom's short write-up on the Engagement Day, Annie's book review of Jay Belsky's book, the webinar programme, and any other news items. Paul invited all members to submit brief news items. He aims to circulate a draft for checking before sending it to Costa for final layout, with a target of sending it out before or just after Easter.

Actions: Tom to provide a short summary of the Engagement Day for the newsletter. Annie to resend the Belsky book review. All members to send any news items to Paul. Gurjot and Henry to send any Ireland-related news.

Item 6 – Drop-in Sessions (EvoTalk)

Riadh reported that the first drop-in session (19 February) attracted only 2 attendees out of 13–14 registrations (plus 3 organisers: Riadh, Paul, and Tom). Tom gave a presentation followed by discussion. Tom suggested that free online events suffer from high dropout rates and that the “drop-in” format may feel too vague to potential attendees.

The committee agreed on the following adjustments for future sessions: a shorter, more informal format (approximately 10-minute introduction followed by open discussion rather than a formal presentation); the sessions should be opened to all interested parties, not just trainees; Gurjot suggested allowing advance submission of questions via a Google Form to boost engagement. The College allows up to four such sessions per year. The committee agreed to try at least one more with the revised format before the end of the year.

Item 7 – 8th International EPSIG Symposium (6 November 2026)

Riadh highlighted that this is the 10th Anniversary Symposium for EPSIG, coinciding with the 100th anniversary of the Royal Charter of the College. The confirmed speaker lineup is: Randolph Nesse, Martin Brüne, Anne-Laure LeCunff (King's College, evolutionary model of ADHD), Penny Spikins (Professor of Anthropology, York – compassion and human psychology), Laurence Hurst (Professor of Genetics, Bath), and Paul Keedwell. Riadh is reserve speaker. Proposed session chairs are Agnes, Annie, and Paul.

Lenny pointed out that the event is not yet listed on the College website under SIG events. Riadh will raise this at his meeting with the College conference organisers on Thursday.

(Post-meeting update: The error in the date of the symposium was spotted the day after the EC meeting. All speakers have been notified. 4 have confirmed they are available for 6 November).

After-Conference Dinner

Riadh has provisionally booked the RSM dining room for up to 24 people (estimated £80–90 per head for three courses with wine). Several members expressed a preference for holding the dinner at the Royal College itself for convenience, as had been done successfully on two prior occasions. Paul Keedwell offered to investigate one or two alternative nearby options (e.g. Hawksmoor Guildhall).

Annie queried whether the College would cover speaker travel and accommodation.

Actions: Riadh to explore College-hosted dinner and speaker expenses at Thursday meeting. Paul Keedwell to investigate 1–2 alternative dinner venues. Riadh to email the group with dinner options in due course.

Charles Darwin Essay Prize

Annie raised the need to organise this year's essay prize, with two winners to present at the symposium. The format will remain unchanged this year (essay submissions, closing around 1 September). A discussion took place about the growing challenge of AI-generated submissions. Several members favoured moving to an oral presentation or viva-based model in future, but Annie stressed that any format change must go through the Education and Training Committee (ETC) and cannot be implemented in time for this year.

It was agreed to add a statement to the submission guidelines: "Submissions must be your own intellectual work."

Judging Panel: Paul Keedwell, Arif Khan, and Lenny Cornwall.

Action: Annie to send essay prize information to Paul for inclusion in the newsletter. Judging panel to review submissions after the 1 September deadline. Committee to discuss a possible format change (e.g. extended abstract plus oral presentation) for future years via the ETC.

Item 8 – Evolutionary Mental Health Foundation (Charity Update)

Adam reported that the charity is preparing its first fundraising campaign, with high-quality videos and a campaign launch planned for May. A new volunteer, Christian Cole, has joined from the finance sector. Adam may take up a part-time (unpaid) role dedicated to the charity in approximately five months. He outlined a vision for building a pipeline connecting trainees' translational ideas with academic collaborators and funding, to pilot evolutionary-informed interventions.

Item 9 – Collaboration with WPA Section & Irish College

Webinar Programme

Riadh listed the upcoming webinar speakers: Alfonso Troisi (26 March), Denise Salali (April), Ian Campbell (May), Samir Okasha (June), and Jay Belsky (July). Paul will include this programme in the newsletter together with registration link.

Irish Update (Gurjot Brar)

The Irish section has over 50 college members and 80 in its WhatsApp group. They have applied for a symposium slot at the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland winter conference in November 2026, with Adam Hunt and Martin Brüne as proposed speakers. Gurjot is working on an MD project examining the medical education side of evolutionary psychiatry. Henry O'Brien continues to deliver an evolutionary psychiatry tutorial to medical students at the University of Limerick, with a study evaluating its impact on attitudes and knowledge.

Item 10 – Turkish Evolutionary Group

Muzaffer was absent; no update provided.

Any Other Business

College Elections

Lenny noted that College elections are under way. He is a candidate for Council member. Riadh urged all members to vote for Lenny. The upcoming Dean election was also discussed; Lenny encouraged members to submit questions on curriculum matters at the Dean's hustings to raise the profile of evolutionary psychiatry. Three of the six Dean candidates have already contacted Lenny. One presidential candidate, Reggie Alexander, was noted as having positively mentioned evolution and biology in an editorial.

Next Meeting

After discussion (including avoidance of the FIFA World Cup and the College Congress), the next executive committee meeting was set for **Tuesday 2 June 2026**. The AGM will follow in September as usual.

Post Meeting Update: Riadh forgot to report that the domain epsig.org expired at the end of 2025 and this has now been renewed at his own expense for another 3 years (cost was around £30). Will expire end of 2028.

Meeting closed at approximately 20:35.