DISCOVER 2018: Publicly engaged research at Lincoln
On 4th November 2017, a small group of researchers from the School of Psychology led by Dr. Kay Ritchie (School of Psychology) ran the ESRC-funded 'Community Lab' - a full day of interactive, family-friendly exhibits at Skegness Aquarium. The event ran as part of the ESRC’s Festival of Social Science, a nationwide programme of over 300 events which takes place each November. The hands-on activities (including colouring in for the very young children) covered a range of recent research from the School of Psychology including colour vision, migraines, face perception, eye tracking, and understanding facial expressions in monkeys.

The aim of the day was to take the research to the public by holding the event in a popular location where people wouldn’t usually expect to find members of the University. All psychology staff at the event were involved in engaging the members of the public in conversations about research and exploring visitors’ opinions. In a day-long event, visitors were free to spend as long as they wished at the event, enabling in-depth conversations about social science topics that mattered to them. The diverse range of exhibits on offer meant there was something of specific interest to most attendees.

Formal feedback using questionnaires showed that the majority of attendees were family groups of all ages and indicated that more than 90% of the attendees agreed or strongly agreed that the event was interesting, educational and accessible. The formal feedback was supplemented by anecdotal verbal feedback from visitors, in which the enthusiasm, particularly from young people, was a real highlight for the researchers. Lots of children were very excited to ‘test their skills’ on the demos and several of the young attendees said they had a new interest in psychology as a result of attending. Key positive outcomes of the event thus appear to include newly-sparked interest in psychology specifically, and in science more generally, in young people.

One lesson from The Community Lab is the value of activities which take place outside the University and beyond the city of Lincoln. The Community Lab used Skegness Aquarium as a venue in order to bring research out of the University and straight to the wider public in their own community or holiday venue. Many of the attendees at the event had no prior contact with the University or university researchers, rendering the positive outcomes particularly impactful. Future events may want to consider using equally unusual venues to widen participation.

Key references and further reading
[1] Quiz: Can you tell if this monkey wants to bite? news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/06/barbary-macaque-facial-expressions-quiz

How Lincoln became the capital of earth architecture

Dr. Marcin Mateusz Kolakowski’s (Lincoln School of Architecture and the Built Environment) research focusses on natural architecture - constructing buildings made of unprocessed materials such as straw, earth, bamboo or timber etc. - exploring the relationship the natural building movement has with social dynamics and culture, focussing on the Lincolnshire ‘mud and stud’ design.

EBUKI Clayfest Conference

For a week in July 2017 Lincoln became the British and Irish capital of earth architecture thanks to the annual EBUKI (Earth Building UK and Ireland) Clayfest conference taking place at the Heritage Skills Centre at Lincoln Castle and the University of Lincoln. People from across Lincolnshire were able to attend workshops, trips, showcases and talks on the emerging science of clay from the most prominent British and Irish experts and enthusiasts in natural architecture, aiming to inform and change perceptions of earth architecture. Clayfest offered an opportunity for networking, collaboration and discussion around future projects. The event also provided allowed researchers to gather qualitative and quantitative data in the form of interviews and questionnaires.

One highlight of the Clayfest showcase was Dr. Kolakowski’s lecture on his research into mud and stud buildings accompanied by a visit to a small experimental building ‘Hexagonium’. This 6-walled construction at the University of Lincoln campus was produced by School of Architecture students in collaboration with the East Midlands Earth Structure Society (EMESS). The aim was to investigate whether mud and stud buildings could comply with modern building regulations, a common question amongst local natural builders. A variety of different construction methods were being used so their insulation properties could be compared in this ‘open air laboratory’, whose findings will produce practical guidelines for local builders and inform the building of a new mud and stud building at the Village Museum in Skegness.

The conference with its showcases had a significant impact in promoting local natural architecture, inspiring new research and attracting thousands of visitors. A small model of a mud and stud building was constructed in Lincoln Castle grounds as a physical reminder that Lincolnshire should be known not only for its prominent Gothic cathedral but for its vernacular clay architecture, which also makes ingenious use of local materials and has fascinating past and potential future.