patrick haggard what works.wav

**Patrick Haggard 00:15**

Shall I introduce myself?

**Sophie Scott 00:16**

Please do.

**Patrick Haggard 00:18**

I'm Patrick Haggard. I'm a Professor at the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience, in PALS at UCL. And it's a pleasure to talk a little bit about working practices and working trajectory. I've almost always really liked my job. I've almost always felt extremely privileged to be paid at least I think for a job that I enjoy doing anyway. I've always tried to concentrate on making my job make me happy, so I feel if I look forward to Monday morning, then I'm probably doing my job correctly. And that's good for me and good for the organisation. We're very lucky as academics that we do have a lot of control over what we do. We do have a lot of agency, we do have a lot of ability to select how we work, what we work on. We do have of course, the responsibility to work hard. Nothing annoys me more than a lazy professor. But I've always felt, I suppose a strong link between my happiness at work and my life goals. So, if my works going well and I'm really enjoying the things I'm doing at work, then everything else is probably fine. So very important part of my happiness has been the feeling that I'm doing my job well and making progress at work. That's a good guide.

**Sophie Scott 01:59**

Definitely. Definitely. And if we take a step back to when you were, you know, at school and thinking about what you wanted to do, can you remember sort of what you were thinking about when you were thinking about what you wanted to study at a degree level and what drew you in this direction?

**Patrick Haggard 02:15**

Well, it's complicated. And generally, I like to look forward. I don't like looking backwards too much. I sometimes don't like what I see. What I do remember is when I got to university, I was very lucky. But I also noticed a little voice in me, which said, this is good. I want to stay here. I like it here. And I think I knew pretty much as soon as I joined as an undergraduate that I liked the environment, I believed in the idea of a university. And that for me has been a very profound experience throughout my career that I remember how positive it was for me to be working in a knowledge environment, an environment based around thinking and intellectual activity and understanding, communicating, transferring, educating, and even discovering. And I thought, great, this is my life's career aim. And I've always had that in the back of my mind when I try and do my own job. So, the magic moments for me are the moments when you're, for example, working with a student on a project or in a seminar and you really feel that they're learning, their eyes are being opened, they've understood something, they're going somewhere. And that idea of sort of personal progression of understanding through knowledge for me is the heart of what a university ought to be about. It's something I realised I could... I realised it was a bus I could get on to, if you like when I was an undergraduate and I've always had in my mind, the idea that I might be able to give to other people the kind of enlightening experience of understanding that I remember having when I was a student. So that's what I consider my job is.

**Sophie Scott 04:13**

It's a privilege and an honour to be part of that process, isn't it? It's... I can't, I mean, I think we have fabulous jobs. I just can't believe I get to do this for a living. But what you've identified there is it's a wonderful thing to be part of that kind of journey for other people as well as yourself.

**Patrick Haggard 04:29**

I think so. I think lots of psychological studies show that one thing that makes people happy is helping others. And there's a real sense in which we're lucky in our job that the institution in which we work, if it's doing its job properly, and when it does its job properly, and that that needs to be sort of carefully watched, can do that. It can exist for that. It can exist for the communication of ideas and the transfer of knowledge and I think that's a really important public good, and you know, something, the scale of the entire human race, really. So those are big ideas. But those are also part of my internal motivation. And obviously, everybody has bad days. But when I get a good day, and I feel that I'm part of that project, I feel very grateful. And I try and keep that in mind, even on the bad days.

**Sophie Scott 05:31**

When you were an undergraduate, you were already thinking really about PhDs? Was that kind of something that was in your mind?

**Patrick Haggard 05:37**

Yeah. And even beyond that, I was thinking, oh, those professors who are teaching me, well, they've got a great job and they're great at it, some of them, not all, and that's a good thing.

**Sophie Scott 05:50**

Is there a particular lecturer or professor you can remember that really stood out for you?

**Patrick Haggard 05:56**

I don't think there's one in particular and I don't know whether it's sort of appropriate to name names. But it is true that many, many people find themselves in a particular place, job, subject, university, whatever, because of A teacher. I think we can all remember that kind of experience. I think I've been lucky because I've had several people who've given me something at different stages in my career, and a few people who've given me things that I wanted to move away from, kind of negative signals as well. But I think that's a very important kind of social interaction. In terms of sort of work life, I joined UCL on the first of January 1995, after a three-year postdoc, and I found that quite, quite interesting the first few years. So, first of all, one of the interesting features about the British academic system is people become scientifically independent when they get their first lectureship type position, often quite young, I was 29. And then it's a little bit like jumping in at the deep end of the swimming pool. And you have to suddenly start, for example, directing another people's research. Whereas a few weeks before you were a postdoc, and somebody might have been directing your research. So, you've got this very sharp transition to independence. And traditionally, Britain has had a rather kind of sink or swim attitude towards that point. I think now, we're much more aware of the fact that new academics need training and induction and they need mentoring. So, I think that is very important. The number of people who need mentoring into an academic role is very high. And we're not very... We're not as good at it as we should be. And it really does make a difference. So, I spent a few years not exactly struggling, but just trying to figure out what were my responsibilities and how do I give a good lecture? Or how do I understand what I'm supposed to do in terms of supporting students in learning or working with colleagues on research projects. And in my case, that sort of coincided with moving to London, trying to find somewhere to live, trying to actually make the place that we found actually liveable as opposed to a ghastly wreck, and also, I had a very young child. So, my daughter was, I think, eight weeks old when we moved. So, looking back, those were very, very difficult years. I don't think I realised at the time; quite how difficult they were.

**Sophie Scott 08:49**

It's combining a lot of quite stressful events, isn't it? Moves, new jobs, new family, all at once there.

**Patrick Haggard 08:55**

Lots of life events at the same time, and that's something that psychologists have done a lot of research on and I know that it's a major risk point for mental health. So that was a difficult time. And I think I probably would have benefited from having more mentoring. I think people were very nice. But it's a time when people need quite a lot of support, because they don't really know what to do. And I think we perhaps need to pay more attention at the point where people transition into a new role. We need to make sure that it's somebody, not the line manager, but somebody senior and helpful who can just sort of watch that they're making the transition correctly.

**Sophie Scott 09:38**

I think one of the things that's been interesting over the past few years, certainly at UCL is an increased interest in and practical attempts to get a mentoring system set up and we have reasonably good ones sort of going now. It's going to get stronger as more people get involved in PALS, but also, bearing in mind really the needs for early career researchers because it's not just kind of tick box exercises, you move from one thing to another, your role significantly changes and you're going to navigate that.

**Patrick Haggard 10:07**

They have to navigate that, and they get very few clues. And many of them are very anxious. Because in the early career role, I mean, PhDs often tend to work quite well, because they're quite fun and it's your PhD and you have quite a lot of independence. Once you're a postdoc, you often lose independence, because you're then working on somebody's grant. And then you're supposed after three or whatever years to become a lecturer and be suddenly fully independent. And I think a lot of early career researchers are really quite anxious about that process. And they need to be mentored and encouraged to sort of prepare themselves for academic independence. I think the PALS mentoring scheme is excellent. So, I got asked a few years ago to mentor somebody on that. And it was brilliant. It worked really well. So, we met I can't remember every maybe four or five months. And both of us really enjoyed the discussion, we had a very open and supportive sort of discussion. There were a number of problems I hope I was able to advise about, but also, I learned a lot from talking to my mentee. The other thing which, just as a tip, we made a point when she came and we had the mentoring sessions, we always went out, we never went to the office, we always went to a cafe and somehow that just made the atmosphere kind of neutral and as a result, it was very, very open and very successful. Very good programme. So just going back to the early career stage, the other thing which for me was very important in terms of work organisation and work habits was the UCL day nursery, which I assume is still going strong. Right? I think probably lots of people that we know have been through it in one way or another. But both of my kids went to UCL nursery. And that meant that I had the main school run job of bringing the kids into work and taking them to the nursery and then picking them up at the end of the day. It was an excellent nursery. I'm sure it still is. It provided very high-quality childcare at a then reasonable cost, now even more reasonable because now there are tax concessions that workplace nurseries have, which they didn't have then. And I think it really made my role at UCL possible. It meant that both I and my partner were able to continue working. It meant that I was just able to find enough hours in the day, to do my academic duties and gradually build my career, even though I also had two young children. I wasn't the sole caregiver but quite a lot of my life was focused on my children and rightly so. So, I would really say how important childcare provision in the workplace is. I think it's a really important thing that employers can do. I think it's something that working parents really appreciate and really like. It's something that kids really like. I can remember one of the best things that I enjoyed when my kids were nursery. The first year that they were there, they were in a sort of a real class for babies and I used to, during my lunch hour, walk from the department to the nursery and spend a bit of time first with Emily and then with Chris. I used to give them their lunch and then sometimes I'd take them to Gordon Square and kick a football around just for 20 minutes and of course, it was a lovely thing for me to do in the lunch break and really nice to feel that I could do that and still do my job. So, it dealt with a lot of the stresses that inevitably young parents have nowadays. So, please keep the UCL nursery open and expand it if we can.

**Sophie Scott 14:27**

Yeah, no, it's and it's really very refreshing to hear people discuss it in a way that you know, it is an as important part of your life as anything that you're doing at work, arguably much more important, and it's not something to be fitted in around the edges. You know, the happy life for me is one where I've got my family time and my work time and I'm enjoying all of them. But one's not getting squeezed because of the other.

**Patrick Haggard 14:53**

Yes, I think... We moved to London because I got a job at UCL and when I got a job at UCL, and one of the things that we were afraid of, if you like was that, you know, we'd be living a long way out, we might be living a long way out of the centre, we'd have to get childcare local to where we lived. And then you have a long commute into town and long commute back. So, you wouldn't see your kids until, what, seven o'clock at night. So, I think that's a fear that a lot of parents have. And of course, the workplace nursery solves that. So, for you know, six years of my life, I was sitting on the train with either one or two children, counting bridges going past or reading storybooks and bringing them with me on the commute. The trains were less crowded then than they are now. I'm not sure it would be as easy to do that these days, but we made it quality time. And that made me happy. I think it made them happy. It made me able to do my full day's work without anxiety. And without sort of cordoning off and walling off all of those other responsibilities that I had as a parent. So, I felt for a long time that, you know, the UCL nursery would be enough to keep me at UCL, even if I got offered some offer that I couldn't refuse by some competitor, which of course, actually never happened. But if it had done, I sort of felt, well, no, the nursery is important.

**Sophie Scott 16:38**

One of the things that is odd about our jobs is, I think it's a lot more creative than people think a scientist would be because we have a great deal of freedom really to pursue things that we find interesting. I mean, within sensible limits and fundable programmes and realistic questions you can ask with science, but we have a lot of control over what we decide we really want to spend our time thinking about. And so, it's always interesting to look at the different things that are attracting everybody's attention. One of the things I found very interesting about your work is you have a kind of breadth of view, and a sort of curiosity across topics. It's not unfocused or uninterested but is it seems like properly academic, and I'm using this in the most profoundly complimentary way, that you know, sort of Charles Darwin could sit down and think about how have they got to this state. I'm not saying there's anything wrong in going out and having lots of hypotheses and testing it but also just having a kind of a look, let's understand the system by looking at it many ways. I think you do function imaging, you do robots, you do, you know galvanic skin response, and you have a really interesting approach, I think in that perspective.

**Patrick Haggard 17:51**

Well, that's very flattering. I mean, I like to... I like the breadth. I think depth and expertise are essential as well. I think it's not good, if you're a professor in a leading research university to have a superficial or meagre knowledge, you have to know what you're talking about. But I like to have broad interests. I've always enjoyed that. I think we're talking about undergraduate experiences. I think that's something I found very early on, that I liked about universities. And that's deeply embedded in historically the idea of what a university is. So, a university traditionally has been a place that is not narrow, so it might be deep, but it's not narrow. So it has seen the added value and the advantage of being able to talk to people who have a different perspective to understand different ways of approaching a question, to have an opportunity to try to approach a from different ways, and to bring knowledge together to produce understanding. So, that's my vision of what the job is. And I think one thing that I've discovered in terms of work practice is you need to have time and make time. And you need to have opportunity and make opportunity to allow that to happen. So, you need to be able to fall into conversation with people or go to a seminar simply because one of the keywords in the title sounds interesting. It's partly a personal thing about being able to lift your eyes from the ground in front of you and look around, look up a bit, look up, look around a bit and to allow yourself to be inspired. It's also part of the culture that the university ought to offer us. So I worry for example about colleagues in universities that either always have been or are rapidly becoming teaching factories that even if they did have broad intelligence and the ability to bring lots of things together that the nature of their job is just too routine-ised, that there isn't a slack to allow people to make connections. I think you've got to face up to that in a university if you really want to get the added value from having people sparking off each other and making new connections and putting things together which nobody had previously thought of combining. You're going to have a slightly inefficient organisation because you're going to have to have people bumping into ideas and opportunities that that are unexpected. You've got to allow space and opportunity for mixing. And I think that's... I mean, I'm not a university manager, but if I was, I'd be thinking how can we preserve that, despite all the pressures that the modern university is under?

**Sophie Scott 21:05**

Yes, a lot of stuff that would be hard to sort of list as a time record of this is what I spent my time doing would be hard to justify in academia, but actually, it's where things are actually happening.

**Patrick Haggard 21:15**

It's where the ideas are germinating.

**Sophie Scott 21:17**

The talks and the, yeah, where things get started. So, what keeps you doing what you do? How do you maintain... How do you not get bored or, you know, sometimes people say, yeah, I'm studying something completely different.

**Patrick Haggard 21:40**

Yeah, good question. I mean, of course, I do get bored and I do get fed up sometimes. I think everybody does. So, I think, as I said, personal happiness in work is for me, still possible. I'm very privileged and pleased that I can still be happy to do my work and I try to listen to the signals and try to follow that. So, I was describing to my partner, a committee that I'm on. And she observed that every time I talk about the committee, I'm obviously really stressed, so she said, why are you doing that committee? Why don't you resign? I thought, that's a good idea, why don't I. I haven't but... So, I think there are a number of things that influence how we work or how I work. So, one is responsibility. So, we are in a position of responsibility. And that means there are some things we have to do. I really try hard not to fail to do something that I've undertaken to do. And there are quite often occasions where you need to work extremely hard. Let's say you take on a student to do a project and the student struggles or the thing that you thought you were studying turns out to be extremely elusive and you just need to find the extra time, energy, resource and thinking power to deliver what you've undertaken to do, and of course to help the other person. So, I don't like letting people down. And that means I quite often do end up working very hard, particularly with deadlines approaching either for student work or research work or committee work. I do a lot of committee work as well. So, a sense of responsibility and hard work, I think are part of it. I do use substantially the flexibility of the academic job. I'm very, very grateful and privileged that I'm able to do that. So just to give an example, I find that my best time of day for writing or thinking or doing anything difficult and creative tends to be the early morning. And now that I don't have children to take to school, because they're all grown up and wonderfully independent, I quite often spend a couple of hours at the beginning of each day at home, at my desk at home, writing or doing something which I know requires real concentration and difficulty. And I don't typically feel I need to be at my desk in the university by 9 or 9:30, or even 10. I sort of feel I need to do some good work this morning. And then when I feel that I'm ready to go into university, I'll go into university. I quite often spend the day working at home, less now than I used to, but good if one can. And the other thing that I've discovered, which I sort of hope doesn't sound like banging on, I've discovered that I'm happier and I work better if I get physical exercise every day. Now, I'm lucky that I've been able to build that into my life. And I've just learned that's the right thing to do. It sounds odd, but I know that I'll write a better paper or teach a better lecture if I've been out for a run before or will go for a run afterwards, compared to if I don't, and I don't feel guilty about you know, leaving early, although that's unusual, or arriving late, because I want to do that. Obviously, one has to be careful, one has to make sure one isn't cheating one's employer and cheating the people around one of one's contractual obligation to work with them and for them, but I think we're fairly good, we should be fairly good at self-monitoring. I don't think I do that. And I think I do better work if I'm allowed to have that way of making my life rounded and complete.

**Sophie Scott 25:46**

I certainly, I tend to get up very early in the morning specifically so I can fit some time in for exercise, because I know everything will be better for the rest of the day as a consequence of that. And it's a bit like having a dog. You'd have to walk the dog every day, only I'm the dog. And I'm exactly the same. I don't make apologies for it. This is as important as anything else I'm going to do for the whole day because it makes the whole day go better. Obviously, whatever works for you is, you know, not everybody's the same, but it's definitely, definitely if there was... I think if there was a drug that we could all take that would mimic the effects physically and mentally of exercise, everyone would just be taking it because there's nothing else like it.

**Patrick Haggard 26:31**

The other thing again, which is a privilege. The other thing, which I think is very important to bear in mind in our job is the pleasure of the idea. So you know, sometimes you go through a week where you've got lots of exam scripts to mark or you've got to attend lots of committees or it all seems a little bit tedious and bureaucratic, but sometimes you'll get in a situation where somebodies, for example, talking about their work and you think, oh, that's interesting. and you just find you can get into the discussion and the working out the idea. And for me, that's a real drug, that gives me an enormous surge of dopamine, serotonin, and probably lots of other things as well, because it's so pleasant and so exciting. And sometimes you might actually be able to have a good idea and that might be quite important or quite useful in ways that you do not yet know. And the feeling of engagement, constructive engagement in intellectual activity, I think that's fundamental. I'm always worried now that I spent quite a lot of time on university committees and on governance and things, how much time we spend talking about money and how little time we spend talking about ideas. Now, obviously, you have to have somebody who's looking out for the money, I'm not being naive. But let's not forget the centrality of ideas in the reason why we're here. The reason why we're paid is to have ideas and to communicate ideas and to have other people communicate their ideas to us. And we never need to feel guilty about that. We need to feel positive about it. And I think that's something that I try to bring to the way I do my job is to sort of signal to people, you know, let's talk about the ideas here, or let's just go through the ideas and that's a good thing.

**Sophie Scott 28:43**

Definitely. I have one last question. And then I'm going to ask you to say something else, but so just when you... One of the things you have to learn to do when you're starting your own lab is of course running a group of people. No one ever teaches us to be managers in academia. And everybody solves this problem, it's not a problem, everyone deals with this situation in slightly different ways. There's not a template, one size fits all, for how an academic lab is run. What's been your experience? What do you find works for you?

**Patrick Haggard 29:15**

Yeah, good question. I think it really helps to have good social skills. I think it's much easier to manage people, or at least the way that I would like to be managed myself, if you think about the other person. So, I think a bit of theory of mind is very, very useful. And I think the other thing which is very important is to look at role models. Think about the people you worked for when you were perhaps a PhD student or a postdoc and who were good to you. And then now, the roles are inversed, and you've got to pay it forward. You've got to behave to others as your former good bosses behaved to you, and not behave in a way that your former bad bosses behaved to you. So, I think looking at your own autobiography, and picking or looking for role models is very important in management. And I think constantly realising that you’re dealing with other people's lives and that in a way your job is to at least try to inspire them, to provide them with some kind of intellectual leadership. So, I don't think I've always done it very well. It definitely has got easier as I've done more of it. And the other thing that I would say, I think is very important is to choose your people very, very carefully. So, I pay great attention now to whom I recruit into my research group, because I know that I then inherit a strong responsibility for their happiness and the happiness of all the other people. All you need is one sort of difficult person in your research group and then they will spread mayhem in every direction. So just choose very, very carefully. And as always, with these kinds of management things, if you're in doubt, the first reflex is to go and talk to somebody, anybody, but ideally somebody who's perhaps a bit senior to you, and who can take a sort of a mentoring perspective to the problem you're dealing with. Don't try and deal with it alone. And people are always very, very helpful as a rule.

**Sophie Scott 31:34**

And do you have anything that you... I mean, you don't have to answer this. But would there be anything that you would give somebody as advice about this kind of job who's coming into the system now? Is there anything you feel you've learned that you didn't know when you began? I know, there's probably many things, but like anything that would be useful advice.

**Patrick Haggard 31:54**

Right, good question. So, first of all, I would say don't start this job unless you really enjoy it. So, don't move into the academic industry or the economic sector unless you really enjoy ideas, knowledge. I've got a perhaps a rather personal comment, but it's been very useful for me and I think it's been useful for other people that I've communicated it to. A lot of us, for example, go into academia because when we're at school or university, we like study and we like writing essays and we like controlling the way it's all set down and doing it properly, slightly sort of perfectionistic traits. And we like the fact that we can do it the way we want. You know, I can write my essay or it's my PhD and we have a lot of ownership. And I think a lot of us are attracted by that and that allows us to get involved in the acolyte process and to really get engrossed and to love our work. That's brilliant. And then as the career develops, as you move through your career, your responsibilities change, and you're not going to be for your whole career, the keen student sitting in the library in their own private world enjoying reading the text or making sure their notes are perfect. And you begin to acquire a much greater responsibility to provide things for other people rather than yourself. So, the way that I always think about it is that a lot of us choose the career because we're a little bit monastic. And after a while, what you discover is it's not really a monastery, it's more like a parliament. It's more like the House of Commons. And it's more like there are a lot of people, many of them very intelligent, and they're all broadcasting their ideas and there's no real use you staying in the library and writing perfect notes all your life. That's almost selfish. You need to have a really good understanding of what you're doing. But you also then need to expose those ideas to the wider world, you need to publish them, you need to communicate them, you need to get feedback from them, you need to engage in critical dialogue with other people. So, you need to move in our career from the monastery at the start to the parliament. And none of us are prepared for that shift. And I think one thing that I try and do when I'm mentoring now is to nudge people towards thinking less about their own personal relationship to the knowledge and thinking more about the way that that knowledge plays out in the social sphere and how you're going to transfer it to other people and how you're going to make sure it's actually useful for not just for you.

**Sophie Scott 35:03**

Thanks for listening. This has been What Works. My name is Sophie Scott.